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GOD'S BANQUET WITH HUMANKIND

Twenty-eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time

15 October 1978

Isaiah 25:6-10a

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

Through my modest service of the word I want to communicate to you all the joy and all the optimism that the Liturgy of the Word seeks to convey to us this Sunday, which we could characterize as God's banqueting with humankind. So that will be the title of my homily: «God's Banquet with Humankind».

But to understand this better and to place ourselves in a setting suitable for receiving this message, I want to remind you that the main thread of the Word of God that has been running through all this year 1978 is the Gospel of Saint Matthew, an outline of which we have made available. In seven stages this Gospel of Matthew successively presents that great news the church announces to the world: the kingdom of God has come. This gospel takes us back to the origins of Christianity for it was born of the meditations of those first communities where it was written down.

This book called the Gospel of Saint Matthew was the result of profound, devout reflection. It was not written immediately after Christ disappeared from earth but only later, when the apostles were reflecting about and preaching on what they had experienced. Accordingly, the parables in the gospel reflect not only the thought of Christ the Lord but also the concerns of the early church. Last Sunday we commented on the sixth part of the Gospel of Saint Matthew—chapters 19 to 25—which treats of the crisis that would prepare the way for the definitive coming of God's kingdom, a crisis arising from the mounting opposition of the Jewish leaders. That crisis that was announced by the Divine Teacher himself in the eschatological discourse that climaxes this magnificent section of the gospel. Christ has now entered into Jerusalem, and the events related are taking place on the eve of his death. Christ is engaged in a classic struggle of thought with the leaders, and he's trying to convince them with clear arguments that they should not oppose the kingdom. If they persist in their arrogant opposition, the kingdom will be taken away from them and given to the Gentiles. «There is still time», he tells them. «Open yourselves to conversion». Christ addresses the Jewish rulers directly. What a tremendous responsibility the rulers of a people have because they are the ones who lead the people!

For this reason, sisters and brothers, as a spiritual leader I want you to understand my words in the same way you understand the words of the Gospel: they have to be shocking! They cannot please everyone. There will be those who reject them, and Christ made this clear to us. The ones who rejected Christ were precisely the leaders, who were blaming him for distorting the history of Israel. But Christ was not distorting that history; rather, he was

orienting it toward its true destiny. They were the ones distorting it. We have to place ourselves in such a situation in order to understand the current language of the church. This language is not political or subversive or rebellious. It is a language that preaches love and tells the people, «This is the way to go». It also tells those who are pointing in another direction, «That's the wrong road».

At the same time, we are at the end of the liturgical year. At the end of November or beginning of December another liturgical year will begin with the First Sunday of Advent. As this liturgical year ends, we should adopt the attitude of our young students, who are now gathering the fruits of their school year in their exams, their graduations, their end-of-year celebrations. Let us hope that on these final Sundays we experience the same concern as do the graduating students who are preparing for their exams; that's when they realize how difficult it is to achieve the diploma. But even greater than a secondary school diploma is the course we are enrolled in during the liturgical year. Someone flattered me greatly by making this comparison: «Your Sunday homily is like a university lecture». I have never intended anything of the sort; I seek to be simply a humble catechist, an evangelizer of the people, nothing more. But it is certainly true that all the courses of human knowledge are worth far less than this humble course of evangelization which educates people in the real meaning of life, their true relationship with God, and their responsibilities in society. And this is what we have tried to do. I inform you, then, we are now finishing the liturgical year and offering our reflections on the Gospel of Saint Matthew. Another year will soon begin, bringing a new course with another gospel, but the one who teaches us is always Christ.

We can now understand that the gospel reading this week is not the same as that of last Sunday or of earlier Sundays or of Sundays to come. Yes, the Gospel is always the same, but the historical situations in which people reflect upon the Gospel vary greatly. The community whose reflections Matthew gathered as he wrote his gospel was very different from our community today. We read Matthew in the concrete situation of the communities of the cathedral and of the other places where people are tuned in as we all reflect together on the same message of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's why I'm accustomed, sisters and brothers, to be a chronicler of the week, even though it's a terrible chore. In this weekly chronicle we have to evoke not only the flourishing sincerity and fervor of our church but also the panorama of opposition, persecution, and misinterpretation that besieges this community that is trying to live under the guidance of Christ.

Life of the church

This week we can define the church in very agreeable terms. For example, next Thursday a group of priests serving in our diocese will be celebrating twenty years of priestly life: Father Carlos Mejía, the pastor of Flor Blanca; Father Roberto Crespín, of Ciudad Delgado; Father Benjamín Rodríguez, of Jayaque; and Father Modesto Villarán, of Soyapango. A few days later, on October 25, Father Roberto Amílcar Torruella and Father Sergio Moreno will celebrate the silver jubilee of their ordination.

Speaking of our priests, who are our direct collaborators, we have to reaffirm the notice defending Father Benito Alfaro that appeared in our archdiocesan bulletin; it contains the official testimony of the mayor, a judge, and the faithful of his parish¹. There is also a

¹ *El Mundo* (9 & 10 October 1978).

clarification regarding the unjust arrest of Fathers David Rodríguez, Father Trinidad Nieto, and Mr. Guillermo Cuéllar².

As we reflect today on the context of our church's life, we also are celebrating the banquet of Saint Teresa of Jesus, the Spanish woman who knew how to translate the whole spirit of Carmel to the age in which she lived. Here in El Salvador we have magnificent exponents of that same spirit in the Carmelite Fathers who minister in the parish of the Colonia Roma and also in the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Joseph. The sisters serve in the Colegio Belén, a center for development in the Colonia Utilia of Santa Tecla, as well as in several centers for direct pastoral ministry such as Ciudad Barrios, Apulo, etc. There are also the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Teresa, who run the Colegio Santa Teresa, where I had the opportunity to celebrate Mass and share with the sisters some aspects of their Carmelite spirituality. They also work in the Divina Providencia Hospital and do direct pastoral ministry in San Ramón; they provide services for our community in other centers of social assistance as well. Also providing services are the Carmelite Missionary Sisters, who came from Spain twenty-five years ago; their work among us includes the Policlínica Salvadoreña and pastoral ministry with the people of Plan de Pino and La Laguna in Chalatenango.

Speaking of religious life, I also joyfully bring you news about a meeting the Assumption Sisters held of all their communities working in El Salvador. The purpose was to deepen their familiarity with their founding charism and to find new ways to use it for the greater service of our people. After all, that is what religious life is: women and men called by God to receive a spiritual experience called charism, which is not for them alone but, like the church, for the service of God's people.

This week I was offered a wonderful experience of the church as community in El Calvario in Santa Tecla, where last Sunday night there was great rejoicing and an ambience of celebration! Also, in Soyapango the base communities came together for a delightfully fervent gathering in honor of our Lady of the Rosary.

The community in the village of La Loma in San Pedro Perulapán was thought to be very timid, but with great courage they attended the Mass I celebrated there for the two poor *campesinos* who were killed. How they died and then appeared on the road to Apulo remains shrouded in mystery. Why such timidity? Why all that fear? I could observe it close at hand. During the Eucharistic celebration a group of ORDEN militants approached threateningly with their machetes, as if having some authority. It was as if they were lacking confidence in the bishop and the priests and the sisters who were there with their faithful. I would like to tell you, my dear sisters and brothers, that authority exists for serving not for terrorizing.

Also in Soyapango there was a meeting of lay people to reflect on the pastoral letter. I congratulate them and thank them. The mind of the archdiocese concerning the people's organizations is defined in that letter, which therefore is binding for our archdiocese. In each diocese the bishop is the one responsible for church teaching and discipline. That's why I tell all of you —priest, religious, and faithful—that the true doctrine of the archdiocesan church regarding the people's organizations is what your archbishop has presented to you, and that is

² «Bulletin 46 of the Social Communications Secretariat of the Archdiocese of San Salvador» in *Orientación* (15 October 1978).

what is to be held. As long as the Holy See does not say otherwise, this bishop is the one responsible. Each bishop in his own diocese is the teacher and spiritual leader.

From Apopa we have received a complaint that Caritas has not been allowed to provide assistance in one of the villages. Remember that Caritas is the church's charitable outreach; we want it to be an organization that provides a true service of charity. Please help us, and don't cause problems.

At the same time, the archdiocesan community rejoices during these days with all the beautiful and meaningful celebrations at the end of the school year. Our Catholic primary and secondary schools are gathering in the harvest of this year's pastoral work. Let us hope that all the Catholic schools at the end of the year can rejoice that they were not simply centers for the standard learning; besides that, they must also be advocates of evangelization. Certainly they can make use of the official programs, which they should respect in the spirit of true citizenship, but the spirit that animates the teaching of Catholic schools must be in tune with the pastor who is responsible for the life of the church because Catholic primary and secondary schools belong to the church's life, or else they are not Catholic.

I also rejoice with you, dear sisters and brothers here with me in the cathedral, because our Mass has been the subject of international reporting. Perhaps you're not aware of it, but on September 24, the banquet of our Lady of Ransom, a reporter from the Associated Press was among us, and he described our Mass in an article that was published abroad. However, the article wasn't published here in this country because it made reference to the sad sight of the armed men in the park opposite the cathedral.

Moreover, last Sunday we were honored by the presence of a Dutch TV station filming our Mass; they did the same that night at El Calvario in Santa Tecla. They left with the very agreeable impression of the people's lively presence in the cathedral; they saw people attending Mass not just in a passive way but participating actively by their silence and their prayer and also by the attention they paid to the word of God. I want to thank you, dear sisters and brothers who fill this cathedral, because your presence is an inspiration and an example for your pastor, for our diocese, and, as I just told you, for many beyond our borders.

I also want to bring to your attention a personal remembrance, for which I ask you to forgive me, but today we celebrate the seventh anniversary of the death of a great friend from San Miguel, Don César Augusto Osegueda. With his newspaper, *El Diario de Oriente*, he fought for the same human rights that we are struggling for right now. I also want to thank an elderly and infirm woman from San Ramón who wrote me a nice letter recalling with nostalgia her work with the church; she now has nothing more to offer than her illness and her good will. I say to her, «Nothing better!» Yes, dear sisters and brothers, especially you who are sickly or elderly, you who haven't been able to come to Mass—you are the great wealth of the church, as Pope John Paul I recently said³. I thank all our beloved sick who give an apostolic meaning to their sickness, their incapacity, their aches, and their old age, offering them all up for the glory of God. The woman I'm referring to is Adela Morataya viuda de Hernández. I hope there are many who imitate her in offering to the Lord the treasure of their personal merits.

³ JOHN PAUL I, «Homily during the Eucharistic Celebration in Saint John Lateran», 23 September 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (1 October 1978).

This is the situation of our church today. This is the church that is meditating on the word of the Lord this morning. With this word the church sheds light on the realities that are opposed to God's kingdom and create crises that keep it from spreading, as I will mention in a little while. For now I want us simply to draw from the reading of God's word three key thoughts, and I've put them under the title I already hinted at for this homily: «God's Banquet with Humankind». The first thought is that God prepares a banquet with humankind; the second thought is that God makes the church a messenger of his banquet with humankind; and the third thought is that all people are invited to the banquet, but not all are worthy of the invitation.

God prepares a banquet with humankind

God is preparing a banquet, and the reason is to celebrate the wedding of his Son. Saint Matthew and the first Christians had a very beautiful way of reflecting on the redemption of humankind and the mystery of the incarnation. The redemption is an initiative of God, who desires to save this humanity that has fallen into sin by making it a bride for his Son. The moment when the Word became flesh in the womb of Mary was the moment of God's engagement with humankind. That fruit of the virginal bosom of Mary represented all humanity. The catechism tells us, «In that moment God created a human body into which he infused a human soul, but for human personhood he gave it nothing less than the person of God». All of us, once conceived in the womb of our mothers, are made up of those three elements: body, soul, person. But our person is not divine. That is the great difference between us and the fruit of Mary's womb. As far as body and soul go, the child of Mary was the same as all of us. Christ did not have flesh different from that of other humans; he was a man like any man. But that human flesh was taken on by the divine person, and that's why that man is also God; sustaining all the spiritual and bodily acts of Jesus Christ is the very person of God. This is what theologians call the hypostatic union, which comes from a Greek word that means «personal». *Hypostasis* means «person», so the hypostatic union means union in the person of the Word.

This is how the human nature, the body and soul of a man, became wondrously married to the divine nature in the person of the Word. In our reflection on the gospel we have recalled briefly this mystery of the incarnation. This mystery is the reason why all of you who are married announce publicly to the world the meaning of your engagement. When Saint Paul spoke to those who were married, he told them, «It is a great mystery that I am telling you, for I am referring to Christ and his church» (Eph 5:32). The church is redeemed humanity; she is the humanity that prolongs that body and that soul that formed in the bosom of Mary but then became incarnate through baptism in all women and men. All of us who are baptized are by nature united to Christ, and so it is that married persons represent that mysterious union.

Ah, if only all those who receive the sacrament of matrimony understood this! How great would be the love between husband and wife! It would be like the love Christ has for his church and like the love that redeemed humanity has for its Redeemer! Would that this were understood by all those couples who live together without the sacrament and without giving divine significance to their love as man and woman. This is the big difference for those who live together but don't marry: two persons can join together in love for one another and live all their lives united in family, but if they haven't blessed their union with the sacrament, then they haven't raised it up to the significance of the mysterious union between Christ and redeemed humanity.

When we behold the love and the faith of a holy Christian couple in the world, we can discover in the husband the infinite love of Christ for his church, and in the wife we can discover the faithful love of all of you, dear sisters and brothers, and all of us who make up the church. Just think of what wealth of holiness is there! I was speaking earlier of that elderly woman who offers her sacrifice of sickness to God, of the religious sister who consecrates herself in spirit to the Lord, of the priest who celebrates twenty-five years of a life committed to the Lord—that is all church, love for the church. The martyrs who give their lives for the Lord, the catechists who have no fear of persecution, those who die for Christ if it is necessary—all that is the love of a spouse, the love of the church.

This is the banquet that the Lord is celebrating with humankind, and to give us a better idea of what it's like, the prophets announced it with poetical images such as those we find in Isaiah this morning: «On this mountain I am going to celebrate with all the people»—see how the incarnation is now extended to the whole universe—«a banquet of rich food and choice wines, delicious foods and generous wine» (Isa 25:6). These are material images that express what we as redeemed Christians possess in our church: the grace of God, the charisms, the treasure of his forgiveness, the joy of a serene conscience, a vocation faithfully followed. All that is much more than a table generously set out with wines and rich food. Doesn't it seem to you, sisters and brothers, that even though we don't serve wines and savory food, we still leave this cathedral feeling as though we're coming from the banquet of a king? And more than a king, for we have been with God! Those who have prepared themselves draw close to the altar to receive the heavenly bread in the banquet of the King who is celebrating the wedding of his Son. What a marvelous thing communion is! How wonderful is the Eucharist!

But the same prophet translates that material image into the spiritual meaning of God's banquet. Take note of his beautiful language: «Here on this mountain God will destroy the veil that covers the peoples, the web that is woven over all the nations. Here the Lord will destroy death forever. Here God will wipe away the tears from all faces; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth» (Isa 25:7-8). Shouldn't we sing a song of hope and be filled with optimism, knowing that this Christianity that came to us with Christ through the Virgin Mary and that becomes incarnate in all human beings who have faith is the presence of a God who has kept his promises? Sisters and brothers, El Salvador does not always have to live the way it is living now. God tells us, «I will tear off the veil of ignominy that is covering all those people. I will wipe away the tears of all those mothers who no longer even have tears to weep from so much crying for their lost children». Here also the Lord will take away the sorrow of all those homes that are suffering this Sunday because of the mysterious kidnapping or murder or torture or torment of their loved ones. That is not from God. The banquet of God will come. Just wait for the hour of the Lord. Let us keep faith. All this will pass like a national nightmare, and we will wake up to the Lord's great banquet! Let us be filled with this hope!

In a very significant way, the church is that mountain of which Isaiah makes mention. Mount Zion was the place where the temple of Jerusalem was built; it was for the Jews the symbolic center where God met with his people; it was where he celebrated his union, his covenant, his pact with them. That is the meaning of matrimony. Let me explain something to those who cannot understand how God's love for humanity can be compared to matrimony. In both cases we are talking about an alliance or an agreement. It is like the boyfriend who asks his girlfriend, «Do you think you're able to be married to me for the rest of your life?» When the two of them come and kneel before the altar, it is their mutual agreement that God is ratifying.

«What God has joined together, no one can separate» (Matt 19:6). In this same way God was united to this holy mountain, which was a symbol of his love for his chosen people, Israel.

God makes the church a messenger of his banquet for all humanity

So it is that this mountain is the church, which is a messenger of God's banquet—now I'm touching on my second thought. The church has inherited all the beauty of Mount Zion and all that wealth of promises that God made to Abraham and to the whole people of Israel. In Christ Jesus that rich inheritance passed to the Christian people, who now have the sign of the church and also of God's holy mountain.

At this very time the attention of the whole world is directed toward that holy mountain. Perhaps you already know or heard on the Voice of America that early this morning in Rome the first puff of smoke came out of the Sistine Chapel: black smoke. At noontime Sunday—remember that there they are seven hours ahead of us—there was still nobody elected, but the entire world has its eyes fixed on that chimney. As soon as white smoke emerges, there will be great joy throughout the world. A cardinal will come out on the balcony of the holy mountain to tell the world, «I announce to you a great joy: we have a pope!» He will then announce the name of the cardinal elected and the name that he has chosen as pope.

Dear sisters and brothers, this is beautiful, but the church is not only the Vatican. There in the Vatican we find the supreme pastor, the most complete expression of the church, but all around the world this beautiful banquet is ready to be celebrated with everyone, for the church goes forth as the messenger of God's banquet. As I said before, we bishops are the ones responsible for each diocese. If there are organizations of bishops, these have an ecclesiastical character, but the one responsible before God for his diocese is still the bishop. Above the bishop there is no one else responsible except the pope. He is the messenger, the one who points out the way to the banquet. I am grateful to you, sisters and brothers, for the many proofs of your solidarity with your pastor but it is not me you are following; it is the banquet of our Lord you are seeking.

How do we understand this banquet in terms of the church? To help us reflect on this point this morning I have chosen the text from the Second Vatican Council which states, «Those persons are fully incorporated into the society of the church who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept her entire system» (LG 14). The first treasure that the church has is the Spirit of Christ. The church is a hierarchically organized society, and the bishop is the one directly responsible for his diocese. Naturally, the bishop is in communion with the pope, who is the only one to whom he must render an account. If the faithful were to prescind from the bishop, going over his head to appeal to the bishops' conference or the pope, they would not be accepting the integral organization of the church. The Council also says that the faithful «also accept all the means of salvation that have been established in the church» (LG 14). Here is another rich aspect of the banquet. What we are celebrating now—the Eucharist, communion, forgiveness in confession, the baptism of children, the blessing of marriages, priestly ordination, the institutes where men and women religious consecrate their lives to the Lord—all these are the means of salvation established in the church. «And in this visible body the faithful are united with Christ, who rules this church through the supreme pontiff and the bishops and through the bonds of the profession of faith, the sacraments, church governance, and ecclesiastical communion» (LG 14). In this brief text of the Council, then, the whole of Isaiah's beautiful prophecy is translated into the language of the church, the language of

Vatican II. God is calling all nations to his banquet on the holy mountain that Christ established in this organization, this institution called the church.

You will perhaps then ask me, «How can there be salvation outside the church?» And I will respond to you that the same Council affirms that all those who have recognized the organization of the Catholic Church as the instrument possessing all the means of salvation cannot be saved if they do not accept her with all her means (LG 14). This applies to those who recognize the truth. In our case, sisters and brothers, I am saddened to think that in our diocese there are many people—perhaps priests, perhaps sisters and Catholic institutions—who do not accept the totality of the institution and so are not on the path to salvation. But it is different in the case of those who do not recognize this institution. Priests, of course, cannot plead ignorance because they have studied the institution of the church; the same goes for Christians who have received some instruction. But there may be situations where there is no religious instruction so that some people are ignorant about the church. In regard to these the Council states, «They also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or his church but who sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience» (LG 16). How comforting it is to think that grace will also be given to those who, not through ill will but because of ignorance, are unaware of these means the church offers them but who still try to live honest and holy lives. Through some other means besides the sacraments they will be touched by grace, the Holy Spirit, Christ! There is no salvation without Christ, but they will find him in their own way.

I am going to mention here, dear sisters and brothers, the second reading from Saint Paul because he presents an excellent model for the church's messengers, and that is what we are talking about here. I already told you about the situation in which Paul wrote this letter we've been reading for the past three Sundays. Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians was written in prison. Paul, like all prisoners, is fearful and is wondering: «What are they going to do with me?» Nevertheless, he is filled with great trust and thanks the Philippians who sent him some economic assistance by means of a fellow Christian. It is while expressing his gratitude for that support that he pronounces the words that were read today: «I thank you for having shared my tribulation through your alms». But with a healthy independence of material goods—that's the kind of apostle he is—Paul tells them, «You should know that I am trained and ready for everything: for eating well or for going hungry, for living in abundance or for being in need. I can do everything in him who strengthens me» (Phil 4:12-13). In other words, Paul is saying, «Thank you for providing me food, but even if I were dying here in jail and no one remembered me, you should know that I trust in the Lord. I receive the gifts you have placed in my hands and thank you for them because I know that "my God in return will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"» (Phil 4:19).

This is the magnificent attitude of an independent soul, someone who does not make his preaching and his church depend on financial support. This is something very difficult in our own church, sisters and brothers, freeing ourselves from the idols of money and power and presenting ourselves to the world as boldly independent, in the same way Paul did. We thank those who contribute to us, but we also let them know that their gifts are not necessary and that no one is going to put conditions on my preaching with their gifts. I give you all many thanks, but please understand that my debt is to God and not to you. I am very grateful, but even if you forgot about me, I would love you just the same, and I would preach to you the same as I do now. This is truly the message of God's banquet, sisters and brothers.

I want to hold up this valor and this bold independence of Paul, the authentic preacher, as an example for all you catechists, all you priests, all the Catholic institutions, and all those who want to build an authentic, Gospel-inspired church. Let us become independent, not in a proud, arrogant way, but as persons who adore the one and only God and place all our confidence in God. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. My strength is the Lord. My wealth is Christ. My hope is the Lord. In him my country will be saved. To him I pray, in him I trust, and him I preach. The more truly you believe this, the more richly you will enjoy the banquet of God in your own hearts. As long as you're trying to combine trust in Christ with trust in money, you will never enjoy God's banquet.

All people are invited to the banquet, but not all are worthy of the invitation

Finally, sisters and brothers, we ask, who are the ones invited? In today's readings we heard Isaiah tell us that God is preparing his banquet for *all* peoples; he will remove the veil of ignominy that covers *all* peoples (Isa 25:6-7). Everyone is called. When the king sends his servants out to invite people to the banquet prepared for his son's wedding, notice that there are two summonses. The first was to the privileged, chosen people, Israel, but they were not worthy. Remember the situation in which Jesus is speaking: it's the final week of his life. It is the climax to the struggle and the conflict between the true Gospel that he is preaching and the false religion that the Pharisees and the rulers of the people of Judea have devised. That struggle is now reaching its tragic culmination in the crucifixion. But Christ does not yield; he tells them directly that they have not been worthy of God's invitation. It's simply not true that the Gospel is preached only to the poor; the rich are also called, but for them to accept it they need to be poor in spirit, and that's what is difficult. To feel a unique need for God we must be independent of material goods. That is the only way we can desire God's kingdom and receive it.

Here Christ is giving us a response to the slander that's often heard: «Why is the church preaching only to the poor? Why speak of a church of the poor? Don't those of us who are rich have souls?» Of course you do, and we love you dearly and want you to be saved. We don't want you to perish as prisoners of your own idolatry. We ask you to become spiritual, to be poor in spirit, to feel the destitution and the anguish of the needy.

Then the king says, «Go out onto the highways, there where the poor people are. Call them and invite them to come» (Matt 22:9). Then people of every sort fill the hall that was prepared for the chosen ones who were found not worthy. At this point comes a second parable: «When the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there who was not wearing a wedding garment» (Matt 22:11). This showed a lack of courtesy. As poor as people may be, when they are invited to this kind of banquet, they try to look as decent and clean as possible, even if their clothes have patches. It seems that this individual is the kind of person who pays no attention to such matters; he was lacking in courtesy. Indeed, not even the church should be lacking in such courtesy. The king confronts the man who, despite the king's goodness in inviting the poor, made himself unworthy, and says to him, «My friend, how is it you came in here without a wedding garment?» (Matt 22:12). The man does not open his mouth; he can make no excuses; he has failed, and this is a great lesson.

I already read you that text where the Second Vatican Council says that the church possesses all the means for salvation, but the Council also adds some frightening words: «They

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, as it were, only in a “bodily” manner and not “in his heart”» (LG 14). It is not enough to attend Mass on Sunday. It is not enough to call yourself Catholic. It is not enough to bring your children to be baptized even though this may be a festive social occasion. Appearances are not enough. God is not satisfied with appearances. God wants the garment of justice. God wants Christians clothed in love. God wants those who enjoy his banquet to make a personal effort. Christ alone saves us, but he will not save us without our doing our part. Saint Augustine said, «God, who created you without your help, will not save you without your co-operation»⁴. God did not need your consent to create you, but to save you he needs to use your freedom so that you know how to use the things you own and the person you are freely and with a sense of justice and charity.

Dear sisters and brothers, this is the precious lesson of God’s banquet with humankind. Who are those invited? The gospel ends with the words, «Many are called» (Matt 22:14). That means everybody, all peoples. For God there are no categories, and neither for the church are there any distinctions. That’s why the church disturbs people. It is the world that insists on maintaining distinctions while the church knows that there is only one category: the just, those who respond to the Gospel, those who enter God’s banquet with appropriate dress and with hearts converted. That’s why many who are called to God’s banquet cannot enter yet.

Events of the week

What do you think about the present situation in El Salvador? The most scandalous case this week—scandalous because it is a great affront to human dignity—is that of Reynaldo Cruz Menjívar. He had been listed among the disappeared since 21 December 1977, and then he suddenly appeared on September 29. He said he had escaped from the prison of the Treasury Police. He is seeking asylum in the embassy of Venezuela. Do you want to know the condition he was in when he arrived? I have the doctor’s certificate here: «The physical examination revealed a marked paleness of skin, extreme bruising, a cadaverous face, sunken eyes, aquiline nose, coated tongue, hemorrhagic gingivitis, both old and new lacerations and scratches, no problem with heart and lungs, sunken abdomen, and extreme sensitivity in various parts of the body. Also, the psychic state of the patient was found to be extremely altered». These are the men that we are creating! That is why we cry out, «Where are the disappeared?» In the declaration he made before a lawyer⁵, Cruz Menjívar stated that he had seen two other detainees: José Adalí Morales⁶, a student in his final year of economics, and Cecilio Ramírez. One is near death, and the other is going blind and deaf. In face of such a tragedy the church cries out, «Amnesty, or bring them before the courts!»

In keeping with the church’s demand for respect for human dignity, we also want to take issue with the views of a political party and a people’s organization⁷; they are not viewing this man in terms of the medical report or the church’s pastoral concern. Rather, they see him from the angle of their politics and want to make of him a banner for their party. This also is unjust! If we speak out against these outrages and on behalf of human rights, we do so out of

⁴ SAINT AUGUSTINE, *Sermons*, 169, 13: PL 38, 915.

⁵ «Testimony of Political Prisoner Reynaldo Cruz Menjívar», *ECA 360* (1978) 840-858.

⁶ The surname of José Adalí is Melara.

⁷ The Christian Democratic Party and the Front for Unified Popular Action published two statements in which they presented the case of Reynaldo Cruz Menjívar as proof of the existence of political prisoners, whose liberation they demanded. See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (7 & 14 October 1978).

love of God and because Christianity requires us to wear a festive wedding garment when entering this church that is charity and love. The politicians who want to manipulate people's misfortune and pain are also sinning against human rights.

Still another scandalous assault is in process: the military operation in Cinquera and the surrounding areas. The National Guard, the Treasury Police, the army, and ORDEN have occupied the villages around El Coco, Cacao, and Llanitos, and it seems that they want to repeat there the terror they inflicted on Aguilares and San Pedro Perulapán: sackings, arrests, tortures, and people fleeing to the mountains⁸. Among those being persecuted are those who also talk about the church's doctrine or simply anyone who has a Bible. In those campaigns they take the words of the archbishop and the priests and distort them, as if we weren't proclaiming Christ's love but were calling the people to subversion. All of you can bear witness to this. Our case is like that of Bishop Helder Cámara, whose telephone and correspondence were subjected to government surveillance for fourteen years. He told the people, «I was not born for insurrection, and I'm happy that even the government realizes that I have not preached what they're saying I preach»⁹.

We deplore the murders and the disappearances that are happening in the urban area as well these days, and we want to unite with those families—too numerous to mention here—in their pain, in their prayers, and also in their demands. This cannot be! A man or a woman goes out on the street to buy some *pupusas*, and they find themselves abducted!

In this reflection on God's banquet and those who are invited and found not worthy, I would also like to inform you, sisters and brothers, of the death of Ricardo Colocho Bosque, a farmer of Santa Ana, and of what the Ministry of Defense said in that regard¹⁰. The statement deserves our reflection. The military authorities say they have marked out death zones in our cities and soldiers can kill people in those zones with impunity—the victim is considered guilty. In this regard we recall two cases here in the capital: at the beginning of the year a young man was killed on the road to Planes de Renderos, and in March a young woman was killed at a police checkpoint near the Cine Apolo.

A request has also been made for the reform of the Law of Public Order, but it is very different from what the people are requesting¹¹. The request is to broaden its field of action, to grant juridical competency to all the criminal courts of the republic, and to allow magistrates to extend to 120 days the time permitted for processing charges—this would result in more jail time for poor prisoners.

We were delighted with the news that the International Press Society has analyzed the degree of freedom of press in the western hemisphere, and naturally we were happy to see the name of El Salvador among the countries that enjoy this freedom. That is why we were very sad to hear the vigorous protests of reporter Enrique Salvador Castro, a member of the Association of Journalists of El Salvador, after he had been handcuffed and beaten by the

⁸ «Solidarity» in *Orientación* (22 October 1978).

⁹ *La Prensa Gráfica* (9 October 1978).

¹⁰ Ricardo Colocho Bosque was killed by a soldier of the military base of Santa Ana when he was passing near the military installation. The Ministry of Defense justified this action, saying that for reasons of security the civilian population was restricted from moving in the environs of the bases of security forces and military units. See *El Diario de Hoy* (13 October 1978).

¹¹ *La Prensa Gráfica* (6 October 1978).

police¹². Being assured of press freedom, we hope that there will be no more inquisitions regarding YSAX and *Orientación*. We trust that these means of communication will be allowed to enjoy their freedom so that the church can, even with these minimal means of expression, freely exercise her right to proclaim her faith in Jesus Christ and God our Lord.

Sisters and brothers, our church, now united in reflection, is about to be nourished by Christ, who was the first to suffer this crisis when confronting a world that did not want to believe in him. From this church let us raise up our cry of faith and hope in the Lord. Let us stand.

¹² *La Prensa Gráfica* (7 October 1978).