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IN CHRIST ARE REVEALED THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF THE TRULY GREAT

Twenty-fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time
23 September 1979

Wisdom 2:12,17-20

James 3:16-4:3

Mark 9:29-36

Thanks be to God, dear sisters and brothers, the fourth pastoral letter is finally being distributed¹, and I earnestly recommend it to you because it is our sincere effort to help the archdiocese address the present situation of the country. At the same time, it officially presents the document of Puebla to the archdiocesan community so that those wise pastoral directives will take on life among us, as the pope desires². Our archdiocese always seeks to be attentive to the pope's will and to receive enlightenment from the teaching of both the universal and the continental church. This teaching gives us much strength. I would therefore like all those who feel committed to our archdiocese, and even those who criticize us, to study the authentic, not the falsified, teaching of our archdiocese.

An especially remarkable aspect of this pastoral letter is what it teaches about the nature of the human person, following the thought of the present pope and of Puebla. In our desire to be faithful to this doctrine and the pope's wishes, we cited Puebla directly: «Human persons, by virtue of their dignity as images of God, deserve our commitment to their liberation and full flourishing in Christ Jesus. Only in Christ is true human greatness revealed, and only in him does the reality of human interiority become known. It is for this reason that we address all men and women and announce to them the joyful news that humanity has been assumed and exalted by the Son of God himself, who chose to share with them the joys, the labors, and the sufferings of this life and the heritage of eternal life» (P 169).

That is the main reason we come to Mass every Sunday: to know Christ and his great mystery, for it is by trying to understand the mystery of Christ that we discover our true selves. No one has such a clear idea of human nature as the person who reflects on Christ. The Second Vatican Council states, «The mystery of humanity can be deciphered only in the mystery of the Son of God who became man» (GS 22). It is precisely our reading of the Gospel of Saint Mark, which Sunday after Sunday is guiding our study of Christ this year, that has presented to us the first aspect of the mystery of the Son of God, his being the Messiah. This first part of the year culminated last Sunday with the marvelous confession of Saint Peter: «You are the Messiah» (Mark 8:29). In the second part of Mark's Gospel, however, Christ begins to explain to us that the Messiah is also the Son of man. Indeed, that could be the title of the

¹ *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979).

² JOHN PAUL II, «Message to the Bishops of Latin America», 23 March 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (1 April 1979).

second part of the Gospel of Saint Mark: «The Gospel of the Son of Man». For it is there that Christ gave definite shape to the figure of the Messiah. He was not to be a false, triumphalist Messiah of easy conquests, a Messiah who would effortlessly dominate the world through miracles. No, his messianic conquest would come through the cross, through suffering, through sorrow. The divine grandeur of the Messiah had to be incarnated in the sorrowful Servant of Yahweh. He was to be the Servant in Isaiah's prophecy: spat upon, scourged, crowned with thorns, humiliated as no other man had ever been. This teaching of Jesus disillusioned those who were expecting a triumphal Messiah: «How can the Messiah be subjected to suffering?» That interweaving of triumph and suffering is what Christ is explaining in these texts we are being asked to consider these Sundays, starting from last Sunday.

Therefore, the teaching about human nature and our reflection on Christ run parallel. I believe that today in El Salvador we need more than ever to know Christ. Today there is a great need for Christians, Christians who by their faith become true liberators of humankind. Without them, we will have only aggressive, violent political movements of the extreme right or the extreme left. What we won't have is true humanity. The true liberators that our country needs will come from Christianity, dear sisters and brothers. That means from you and your communities as you reflect on God's word in order to understand the mystery of Christ, as we are doing today. Let us be present-day Christians! Let us not be frightened by the boldness of today's church. Let us cast Christ's light on humanity, making it reach even the most horrible caverns of torture, prison, plunder, marginalization, and chronic illness. The oppressed must be saved, but not with a revolutionary salvation that is merely human. They must be saved with the holy revolution of the Son of man who dies on the cross precisely to cleanse the soiled image of God in today's enslaved, egoistic, sinful humanity.

In the light of today's readings, I would like to title my homily, «In Christ Are Revealed the Three Dimensions of the Truly Great». Only people who are truly great will embody these three dimensions: first, justice proved in persecution; second, service inspired by love; and third, a transcendence that identifies even the smallest and the humblest with God.

This is true liberation, the liberation announced in today's readings, especially in the gospel. In Christ are revealed the three dimensions of the truly great. I believe, sisters and brothers, that the saints have been the most ambitious of people, the ones who wanted to be truly great. In fact, they are the only ones who are truly great. Not even the most heroic earthly deeds can reach the heights attained by the saints. And that is my ambition for all of you and for myself: that we be great, ambitiously great, because we are images of God and we cannot be content with mediocre greatness. What I want is for all of us to aspire to greatness, but to greatness according to these three dimensions that Christ offers us today. Otherwise, there is no true greatness.

Justice proved in persecution

First, there is justice proved in persecution. Today the liturgy offers us a beautiful parallel between the first reading and the gospel. The book of Wisdom speaks to us about how the wicked persecute the just, and the gospel narrates for us how Christ's enemies ridiculed him when he was dying on the cross. They made fun of him saying, «Bah! He said he was the Son of God. Let God come and save him! We'll believe in him if he comes down from the cross!» (Matt 27:42-43). Such was the ridicule that the wicked heaped on the just, and we read something similar in the first reading from the book of Wisdom (Wis 2:19-20), which runs parallel to

today's gospel recounting Christ's second announcement of his passion. The announcement of the passion occurs three times in the Gospel of Saint Mark. The first time was last Sunday, when Jesus was on the slopes of Mount Hermon in the picturesque region of Caesarea Philippi, near Lake Gennesaret. Today he has descended from the heights, and he and his disciples were walking along the shores of the lake. Eventually they reached what is called «his city», Capernaum, and perhaps the house of Peter, where today's episode takes place.

When they arrived there, Christ explained to them once again that the Son of man had to suffer and be handed over; he would be killed, but on the third day he would rise (Mark 9:31). Again, it's a beautiful synthesis of what would happen to Christ! And it's what we will recite at the moment of consecration: «We announce your death. We proclaim your resurrection». In those words you have the essence of Christianity. The Christ must die humiliated, but he will rise on the third day. This is the path of true salvation.

He was the Son of man, but the apostles couldn't comprehend his announcement of suffering, as today's gospel says, «They did not understand, and they were afraid to question him» (Mark 8:32). They were afraid to question him because they knew that he would simply reaffirm what he had said and make even clearer the horrors he had to suffer. It's the same as when people often don't want to accept talk about a persecuted church; it's because they don't want to know about things they don't like. People don't want to hear talk of persecution so they claim that it's all demagogic. They're afraid to ask Christ about the reasons for suffering. But we must not flee from crude and bloody explanations. Instead, we have to ask questions; we have to face up to the persecution and make it ours! That's what Christ wants: «Fear not!» he tells us. «If you want to be faithful, you must follow me. You must deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow me! (Mark 8:34). Only in this way will I have true followers. I don't want cowardly Christians. Have no fear. Be well informed about persecution, and know that it is the only authentic path for those who want to help me to save the world».

Why is there persecution, dear sisters and brothers? Because it is the will of God and the true power of redemption: «Father, if it is possible, take this cup from me, but let it be done not as I will but as you will» (Mark 14:36). Christ had to drink from the bitter cup of the passion. When Peter took out his sword to defend him, he was told, «Put your sword back in its sheath because those who kill by the sword will perish by the sword» (John 18:10-11). It was necessary to carry the cross and be condemned to death as a vile criminal. Nothing mattered except what the Father wanted. It was the Father's will that the sin of the world be washed away with the blood of Jesus, the Son of God, because it was so awful. When we feel rebellious, let us reflect that truest rebellion is the holy rebelliousness of God, for he does not submit to our human sin but asks us to be purified. It was necessary to ask for the blood of his own Son and not to pardon him, so that all our iniquities could be loaded onto his back.

The first reading explains to us the reason for persecution. Yesterday in Guazapa some catechists asked me, «Why this persecution? If we preach what is good, why do people refuse to understand? If we meet together to reflect on the word of God, why do they inform on us, saying our meetings are subversive? Do you know why?» To understand why, we need the wisdom of today's first reading: «The wicked say, "The attitude of the just is a reproach for our sins"» (Wis 2:12). So this is the first reason for persecution: the attitude of the just is a reproach to the attitude of the unjust. It's like when day dawns, the shadows have to flee and hide away. The holy justice of God cannot coexist with the sin of the world. The world must pursue the light, as Christ said, «They loved darkness more than light!» (John 3:19). In this way

we can know whether we belong to God or to darkness. As I told the people yesterday in Guazapa, this is a time when we know who is who! We know who the true followers of Christ are: they are the ones who do not falter despite persecution, misunderstanding, and calumny because they know they are carrying the light.

Another reason is found in the first reading: persecution makes manifest and proves the transcendent ideal that we carry within us. The wicked say, «He says he is a son of God! Let us test him and see if God saves him!» (Wis 2:16-20). Poor things! They think everything is resolved in this temporal history. They think that by humiliating Christians with torture and imprisonment they are triumphing, but they have no idea. (Applause) When speaking of the martyrs, Saint Augustine used to say, «Do you see the executioner holding his triumphant sword over the body of a martyr? Who has conquered? There is no question but that the victim is the victor!»³ Those who have conquered by the brute force of the sword have not comprehended the greatness of those who have given their lives for a sublime ideal. This is the true victory that overcomes the world.

This hour of trial will pass, and the ideal for which so many Christians died will one day shine forth brightly. We are living in a dark night, but Christians can discern beyond the night the glow of dawn, and they carry in their hearts the hope that never fails. Christ walks by our side! Let us not fear! We are children of God even though some laugh at this title, just as they laughed at Christ: «He says he is the Son of God! Let God save him!» (Matt 27:43). They mocked him, thinking that they had triumphed over the Son of God. Christ could have come down from the cross and annihilated his enemies, reducing them to dust, but he kept all his greatness hidden within himself. He was moved by a conviction the blind could not understand: he had to save the world. Persecution is necessary so that those who carry that hope deep in their souls can put it to the test; it is necessary so that unbelievers may be converted and realize that the horizon of history does not end with life but reaches far beyond, to the place where the ideals of God's true children become reality.

I have read with affection Pope John Paul II's eulogy of Pope Paul VI, and it fits perfectly this Sunday with our reflections on the reasons for persecution. John Paul calls Pope Montini an «apostle of the Crucified»: «He knew the interior dimension of the cross. He was no stranger to the insults and disrespect he suffered as a servant and teacher of the truth. He was no stranger to pain or anguish»⁴. I had the good fortune of observing Pope Paul VI close-up, and I saw in his sad countenance the serenity of one truly persecuted for justice. Major world journals called his encyclical *Populorum Progressio* «warmed-over Marxism», and they vilely maligned as «benighted» his marvelous encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, in which, as a true defender of civilization, he prohibits all assaults on the fount of life. When he signed that encyclical, the pope referred to Christ's prayer in the garden: «This has cost us a Gethsemane because we know that what we are going to sign is difficult, but it is necessary». He was truly an «apostle of the Crucified». How wonderful it would be for all Christians to be called by that title: «apostles of the Crucified»! Paul VI knew well the profound philosophy and theology of the cross, and he carried that theology in the intimacy of his heart. The just prove their justice in persecution, and those who fail to understand that are not truly Christian. This is the hour of persecution for our church, and we not ashamed of it. Attempts are made to say that the persecution is justified

³ AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Psalm 36, 2, 3; PL 36, 365.

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily Commemorating the Death of Paul VI», 16 September 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 September 1979).

because the church is meddling in politics and has become subversive and communist, but we know the meaning of those terms, for the same ones were applied long ago to Christ in order to send him to the gallows. Christ knew, however, that he would not die for any of those reasons; he would die for obeying the Father. He wanted to display in his own heart the immense dimensions of the truly great even in the midst of suffering and sorrow.

Let none of you be frightened, sisters and brothers, if you have to suffer innocently. The greater the innocence of those carrying the cross, the greater their worth in the eyes of God. This week I celebrated Mass for a little boy who died of cancer, and I told his grieving parents and those attending the Mass, «Do not be scandalized that God does things like this. It appears an injustice. Why this innocent person? The reason is that God wants to show, before heaven and before history, that on this earth not everything is lost. From this earth, where there is so much hatred and violence, so much evil and sin, God is capable of plucking a perfectly lovely little flower and carrying it to his kingdom and placing it near his throne». Those who are innocent are not ashamed of being innocent and are not scandalized by their suffering. They are pure flowers that God is cultivating in this valley of sludge and sin. They are holy victims that God needs to purify the world.

A little girl is suffering in that same hospital; she's about ten years old, also a victim of cancer. They operated on her head, and no doubt she's going to die. Why is this so, Lord? Here is the book of Wisdom giving us the answer: the wicked seek to confront God with their injustices, but God contradicts them by saying that the good conduct of the innocent is a reproach to sinners. Wisdom also tells us that we must make manifest to the world the transcendence of human reality, which does not come to a full stop in history but is cultivated by God for his eternal life. This is not opium but a way of giving true value to the lives of those suffering here on earth.

There is so much suffering! So much poverty! So many hovels! Even the government has talked about «conditions totally deficient in hygiene, health, and sustenance». Why is this so, Lord? It is the sin of the wicked. Seeing these injustices, we are naturally scandalized by the sinners who enjoy themselves while denying the poor even a little space for a more decent dwelling. Meanwhile the poor are suffering and blaming themselves for the injustices being committed, but God is sanctifying their pain. We also need to be converted, as the pope said in speaking of the Virgin at the foot of the cross: «Hers was not a suffering of alienation». Mary did not submissively suffer those injustices of the empire. Mary knew—and she sang of it in her *Magnificat* (Luke 1:51-52)—that God was capable of sending the proud away empty, and he could, if necessary, cast the mighty down from their thrones when their injustice was just too great. (Applause)

Let us hope that the lesson that Christ wants to give us through the Gospel of Saint Mark is well understood and that it comes alive at this time when we truly need it. What we must understand is that our poverty, our marginalization, our suffering, our hunger, our underdevelopment should not inspire us only to violence and vengeance and hatred. Rather, they should inspire us above all to true liberation. We should accept them as Christ accepted the cross, as the will of the Father, but we should not agree to die submissively under oppression. Rather, we must convert Christ's rising from oppression into the true liberating force of our people.

Service inspired by love

The second thought deriving from today's reading is another dimension of the truly great: service inspired by love. «I have not come to be served but to serve and to give my life for the salvation of many» (Mark 10:45). Christ speaks these words precisely to teach us the same lesson that the humbled apostles had to learn in today's gospel passage. They had been discussing who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. When Christ, who divines people's thoughts, arrived at the house in Capernaum, he asked them, «What were you arguing about on the way?» (Mark 9:33). No one dared to say anything. It was shameful to speak of such pretensions before someone as humble as Christ!

We have forgotten the true Christian spirit, and so we think about who is greater, who is more powerful, who has more money, or who can do more in politics. For Christ these kinds of earthly greatness are neither here nor there, as the expression goes, because even if people achieve positions of leadership in the political or social or economic arena, they should not measure their greatness by material standards, for these can escape from their hands when they least expect.

Christ explains what true greatness is: «Whoever wants to be great among you, whoever wants to be first, must become the last and the servant of all» (Mark 9:35). Argue, then, about who is greatest in the light of this Christian principle! Those will be greatest who serve with greatest humility and love. If the needs of society require that someone be chosen as minister of government, as president of the republic, as archbishop, then that person should be a servant of the people of God! That should never be forgotten. In taking on such posts, you should not have the attitude, «I'm in charge here, and you will do what I command!» You are only a poor servant of God, and you must rely on the help of the Lord to serve the people according to the will of God and not according to your own caprices.

The will of God is what should prevail in the service rendered by authority. It's true that many have criticized us for being subversive, saying that we preach against authority. We have never preached against true authority, but we have certainly preached against the abuse of authority! (Applause) All authority comes from God and must be respected. Authority is good when those exercising it know that they receive it from God and that it pertains to a moral order that must not be transgressed. But when authority trespasses on the moral order and commands things that are wrong, such as assaults on the people and other abuses, then it is the time to remember that text of Saint Paul: «All authority comes from God» (Rom 13:1). Keep in mind also that other text of Saint Peter: «We must obey God rather than men» (Acts 4:19). (Applause)

When Christ organized his church, he taught the apostles the true nature of the church, which is also called by another name, *diakonia*. This is a Greek word that means «service». The term came into use when the apostles were unable to attend to all the Christians, whose numbers were growing. The apostles summoned seven men who were filled with the Spirit of God and called them «deacons» (Acts 6:1-6). So «deacon» means simply «servant». At the same time the church was also called *diakonia* or «service». The church is service.

When talking about the hierarchy, the Second Vatican Council returns things to their proper places. It tells us bishops that we should not pretend to the princely status that has prostituted the figure of the bishop. We are not princes, and we are not kings. We have not

come to be served; rather, the Council tells us that we are «ministers who possess sacred power for the service of our sisters and brothers» (LG 18). I am your deacon, dear sisters and brothers. I am your servant, and all the pastoral ministry deriving from my responsibility as pastor must be offered in an attitude of service, and this is equally true of priests and religious and communities. I am pleased—and I want to express this with great joy—that our archdiocese is understanding the meaning of service better every day. If by chance there are still some smacks of imperialism or paternalism or earthly power among us, I remind you all—beloved priests, religious communities, superiors—that your role is not only to be in charge but to serve the community. You must know how to hear people's desires and orient them toward God so that the needs of the people will be served. (Applause)

And what does the Council say to you who are lay people, who are neither priests nor bishops nor religious? It says that you also are «serving Christ in others so that you might by humility and patience lead your sisters and brothers to that King for whom to serve is to reign» (LG 36). This is the greatness of Christian service: to serve is to reign. When I say that I am your deacon and your servant, I'm not trying to gain your applause by being obliging. In no way do I seek it; you give it to me spontaneously. Neither does it puff me up because I know that it's just an expression of those who agree with the preacher, who is speaking to them and trying to respond to their deepest sentiments. (Applause) I insist that it is not opportunism, but it is something more than that. Forgive me if I tell you that I am not as much interested in your affirmation as I am in God's. I am not at all interested in reigning over your hearts although I feel that your affection, thank God, makes me almost a king of this community. But above all it makes me feel like a king before God. Serving him is to reign, and the more unassumingly I seek to serve the people, the more I will reign. (Applause)

The same could be said if we were to invert the words of the Council: instead of saying «to serve is to reign» we could also say «to reign is to serve». In other words, those who attain to a position of authority should consider it as service so that they «reign» only by virtue of their service. That's why there is so much discontent: we have not understood the happiness of being humble; we have not understood the blessedness of serving; like the apostles, we are still arguing on the road about who is greatest here on earth (Mark 9:34); we are talking about joy and power only in terms of earthly vanities. May all of us who have positions of authority be converted: let us no longer think that we hold our high posts through our own glorious merits; let us realize instead that we're here by the will of God. (Applause) God is going to call everyone to account, even the most humble folk, but he will be strictest with those in whose hands he placed authority that is to be administered according to his heart. «Woe to the powerful», says the Bible, «because they will be more powerfully punished by God» (Wis 6:5-6).

We could continue speaking about this aspect because it is quite beautiful; the best lesson we could learn this Sunday is how to make our joy consist in being humble and serving God in the person of the poor. But as it happens, this brings us to my third reflection, which concerns the third dimension or the third measure of the truly great person according to Christ. The first, let us not forget, is being just in the midst of persecution; the second, which I just reflected on, is service inspired by love and humility; and the third is the transcendence that identifies even the smallest with God

A transcendence that identifies even the smallest and humblest with God

Here we are going to pay honor to the International Year of the Child. What a beautiful gesture it was when Christ took a child from the crowd and placed her in the middle of the disciples in order to make her a symbol of his preaching! Christ is an interpreter of the message of children. We would do very well in this Year of the Child not to dwell on all those sentimental and romantic images which do little to relieve the misery and the poverty of real-life children. A friend told me this morning, «How sad I felt last night when I saw a poor little girl sleeping there on the Boulevard of the Heroes! She had a bunch of newspapers that she hadn't been able to sell, and she knew a good scolding would be waiting for her when she returned home to her shack because she hadn't done her job. It was around eleven at night». This is the sad reality of our children.

Christ took one of those children and put her in the middle of the assembly—a magnificent living parable of Christ! He then uttered the saying we find in the Gospel of Saint Mark today: «Whoever receives a child such as this one in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives not me but the One who sent me» (Mark 9:37). Consider what a beautiful relationship exists between the child and God through Christ. Even the smallest children are great when Christ accepts them as his own cause. This is the church's struggle, and it is described by Puebla as the «preferential option for the poor» because children are the most eloquent icons of poverty.

Reading a commentary on this text of Saint Mark, I found a historical note which said, «In ancient times children were not persons in the full legal sense. Besides having to live under the authority of their parents, they were also considered the property of their parents; they had no right to self-affirmation and no freedom to act. They were truly denied an identity». So when Christ says, «Those who wish to come after me must deny themselves» (Mark 8:34), he is saying that they must become children; they must become human beings with no right to anything, unable to move except with the help of their father or mother. That is the reason why children are not respected and their weakness is taken advantage of. In today's gospel, however, the arms of Christ shield the child's weakness and fragility, and he challenges the entire world: «Whoever receives one of these little ones in my name receives me, and not only me but my Father who sent me» (Mark 9:37). Those who respect children are loved by Christ and are loved by God but not in some sentimental, romantic way, as we just said.

Children are delightful, but it's very dangerous for us to remain only with human feelings. They are so simple and so guileless! Any joke appears funny to them. They seem to be common property because people can go up to a mother who's holding her baby and tell her, «Let me hold him», and take him as if he were their own. We all feel that a small child is ours, and a child's smile is worth millions. When children have enough confidence to give me a smile, embrace me, and even kiss me as they leave the church, it is far more precious to me than if I had millions and were repulsive to children. Children are worth so much, not only in their human aspect, but above all from the perspective of faith that Christ shows us today, when we receive them in his name. This is the divine dimension of Christianity: receiving a child in the name of Christ, that is, as if he were the child Jesus, or as if you sensed incarnate in that child the Son of man with all his divine grandeur.

That's why Puebla is not engaging in demagogic when it speaks of the preferential option for the poor. We are not seeking divisiveness or class struggle. To the contrary, Puebla says, «We invite all social classes without exception to make their own the cause of the poor. Even more, let us consider it the cause of Christ, who at the end of time will

speak to us words like those that he spoke today: «Whatever you do for one of them, you do for me» (Matt 25:40)⁵. The transcendence that the church preaches is not alienation; it is not about going to heaven and thinking about eternal life while forgetting the problems of earth. Rather, it is the transcendence of the human heart; it is getting involved with children, it is getting involved with the poor, it is getting involved with the homeless and with the sick folk in their huts and their shacks. It is sharing in the depths of their miserable situation so that they can transcend it, raise themselves up, and flourish. It is telling them, «You are not rubbish. You are not outcasts». (Applause) Quite to the contrary, it is telling them, «You are invaluable. You are worth as much as those who live in the great mansions that you see but can never own. You are equal. You are a human person like everyone else, an image of God. You also are called to heaven». This is the transcendence that is a true dimension of those who are great.

When men and women refuse to limit themselves to temporal kinds of liberation, when they refuse to think they should be leading others to massacres—and when instead they transcend themselves and become true leaders who endow all their followers with a divine dimension of true greatness, then that is the true liberation that the church preaches. If the church were to preach anything else, she would be disfiguring herself and losing her originality and the force of her liberation. The liberation the church preaches is that which rises from the human heart, freeing people from sin, elevating them toward God, and making them children of God.

In his profound analysis of modern-day humanity, Pope Paul VI mentions one important measure of our transcendent dimension; he said, «We must cultivate the spirit of poverty» (ES 28). The spirit of poverty is far removed from every form greediness that makes human greatness consist in *having* more; true greatness means *being* more. The pope tells us that «we must cultivate the spirit of poverty» which makes people truly great and transcendent because it stops them from kneeling before money, putting them instead on their knees before God. (Applause). It is precisely in this dimension of transcendence that we find the dividing line between those who are truly great and holy and those who are evil, wicked, and materialist. And that's not what I say; that's what today's readings say.

The first reading presents the earthly vision of the wicked: «Let us torture the just man. Let us ridicule him to see whether his word is true when he says he is a son of God. His conduct is a reproach and a bother to us. Let us kill him and be done with him!» (Wis 2:12-20). This is the language of the Bible, but it could well be the language of many criminals today! Why are people killed? They're killed because they're a «bother». In my view, they are true martyrs—in the popular sense naturally. I'm not referring to the canonical sense, where being a martyr supposes a process in which the church's supreme authority declares someone a martyr before the universal church. I respect that law and would never say that our murdered priests are canonized martyrs already. But they are martyrs in the popular sense; they were men who explicitly preached the need to struggle against poverty; they were true men who dared to go to the dangerous limits, to the places where the UGB threatens people with death and ends up killing them, as they killed Christ. These are the ones I call truly just, and if they had their faults, then who doesn't, sisters and brothers? Which of us doesn't have something to repent? The priests who were killed were also human beings, and they had their faults. But they refused to flee; they let themselves be killed; they were not cowards but faced situations

⁵ *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, 3.

of torture, suffering, and murder. All that seems to me to be as valuable as a baptism by blood; they have been purified, and we must respect their memory! (Applause)

Today's second reading draws an even clearer dividing line between the wicked and the just whom they persecute. Saint James, ever the practical man, states it clearly: «The wisdom that comes from above produces justice and peace and all good things» (James 3:17-18). In contrast, he classifies as false wisdom «the desires for pleasure that are at war in your bodies» (James 4:1). What a fount of corruption we are! Those desires for pleasure that are at war in our bodies give rise to that long list in today's second reading: «Jealousy, quarrels, disorders, and every form of evil; struggles, conflicts, greed, murder, ambition, and profligate pleasures» (James 4:1-2).

Naturally these are two diametrically opposed sources. Christ is teaching us the wisdom that comes from above, the wisdom of gracing our lives with the dimensions of service and love, of suffering and sacrificing for others. The other kind of wisdom is born of the human desire for pleasure, which is at war in our bodies. We all feel this desire for pleasure, and the apostle James describes it so graphically that he could be describing the situation here in El Salvador! He says, «Where do the struggles and conflicts among you come from? Is it not from the desires for pleasure that make war in your bodies? You desire what you cannot have, and you end by killing others. You desire what you cannot reach, and so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask; you ask but you do not receive because you ask wrongly and squander it on pleasures» (James 4:1-3). That's not what we should be asking God for. God is not going to be an accomplice to our abominations, but God *will* be a collaborator in our sufferings. (Applause)

Life of the church

Illuminated by this word of God, let us now take a look at our archdiocese. The diverse activities and experiences of this week should help us link the diocese with that wisdom that comes from God. As the pastor of the archdiocese, I have no other ambition than building the church. In my pastoral letter I state, «The first collaboration that the church offers the country in this time of crisis is being herself»⁶. And the task to which I summon fellow priests and religious communities and pastoral agents is the ministry of building our church. If someone were to ask me, «What will the church do if everything is settled tomorrow?» I would answer, «She will keep on doing the same thing». The church is not being opportunistic in her actions but is seeking to be alert to every moment while always remaining church. She will feel blessed if tomorrow there is a more just order and she doesn't have to denounce so many injustices, but she will always continue her work of building on the foundation of the Gospel. This is a work we'll always have, whether there's peace or persecution.

In the curia of the archdiocese—that is, the central offices—we've had some very important meetings. For example, there was a meeting of the priests' senate, which brings together representatives of all the priests to dialogue with the bishop. By means of the senate the bishop maintains relations with all the priests who are represented in the senate.

⁶ *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 31.

We also had a plenary assembly of Difusión Salvadoreña, S.A., the corporation that owns YSAX. I want to tell you that YSAX is run by a corporate body that fulfills all the laws. It is not a pirate operation or anything of the sort; it is legally established.

There was also a very important meeting about which you should be informed, namely, the meeting of the priests supporting the seminary along with the priests who make up the formation team. They came together precisely to dialogue about how best to improve the formation of our priests. This is an area for which I always ask your earnest prayers so that our seminarians receive the priestly training that the present moment of our church demands.

Another commission that I want to inform you about is the one that administers our material assets; it helps the archbishop to administer justly the assets that the church needs for her pastoral mission. A report was given about the situation of our cathedral, which because of the occupations has experienced very serious problems that affect both worship and construction. I would like people to be aware of these difficulties so that the occupations, as just as they may be in fighting for the people's causes, do not obstruct the people's other activities. The fact is that the cathedral is facing a very serious impasse. The rector even had a mind to indemnify the workers and lay them off, but we said that doing that would mean losing everything. It is better for us to make an effort. We're going to see how we obtain the money that's needed to finish the dome, which is the most urgent thing. After that we'll put in the windows, even if in a poor fashion. We *can* make the cathedral usable, even with a dirt floor, for it is a cathedral of poor people. So we won't have finished walls or permanent windows, but we'll have a place that bears witness to a people who want to offer something great to the Divine Savior, but that reaches only as far as their limitations allow. I beg you, then, not to abandon us at this time of trial in the construction of our cathedral.

The priests in the vicariate of Asunción will be making their spiritual exercises this coming week. Each vicariate will organize its own reflection groups for the spiritual exercises. This is a week when we priests take leave of our ordinary activity and spend time reflecting on our situation and evaluating our conduct.

With regard to our religious, Sister Judith Chávez, who had been deported, has returned from Guatemala. This new development gives us hope that the migration authorities will not listen only to the misinformation they receive from ORDEN but will take into account the justice of the church's self-defense. What especially bothers me is that they eavesdropped on a telephone conversation between the sister and her pastor. I don't believe people should be judged by their telephone conversations.

Then there are the Guadalupana Sisters who work in Arcatao. They are also defending themselves against false accusations by the migration authorities, who were surprised to find that they had been given wrong information. Moreover, they failed to respect our vicar general. I want to say that the bishop is represented by his vicar general and that in situations like this one the vicar general has the right to accompany the pastoral agents in order to defend truth and justice.

I'm happy with the community of Claretian priests and seminarians in Santa Tecla, whom I had the good fortune of visiting, and also with the Passionist seminarians who have taken up residence in the rectory of San Francisco parish in Mejicanos.

A Dominican Sister, Cristina Rivas, who works in Chiltiupán, has also been threatened by the White Warriors Union. The letter in which the sister recounts her situation reminds me of what Christ said when they were about to stone him, «I have done many good works. For which of them do you wish to stone me?» (John 10:32). The sister states that they told her to leave the place or otherwise they would kill her because she's doing bad things. She told them, «What I am doing is helping in the community clinic, giving religion classes, and working in the district of Las Termópilas. I'm also giving first aid courses in the school and in the same district; I provide many people with medicine. For which of these works are they going to stone me?» This is the church: always persecuted and always doing good.

In the communities there were some very lovely confirmation ceremonies. One was in the parish of San Juan, Cojutepeque. I'm sorry I wasn't able to go personally to the other parish in Cojutepeque because circumstances prevented it, but I know the ceremony there was also very beautiful.

We had confirmation ceremonies also in Guazapa and Aguilares, where the young people are growing in their understanding of what they're committing themselves to when they receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

The community of Comasagua celebrated the feast of Saint Matthew on September 21. I want to ask their pardon because I was told that they were expecting me, but I frankly don't remember confirming that commitment. Whenever I have a commitment, I fulfill it, thank God. I beg you, then, if there was some misunderstanding, please forgive me. I send you greetings on your patronal feast.

From various places I've received expressions of solidarity for our pastoral work, but I especially want to highlight, because of its significance at this time, the solidarity extended by the Human Rights Commission to our newspaper, *Orientación*. They wrote to me, «It is the only paper that speaks the truth and provides information and guidance for the people». The commission states that there are some who don't want the paper to reach the *campesinos* or the common people, but they will not get their wishes. (Applause) The Human Rights Commission continues, «Like David, *Orientación* is able to overcome all the massive campaigns of defamation and misinformation that are waged by the ultra-right Goliath faction⁷. Many thanks for that support and also for the commission's statement that «it stands in solidarity with the bishops and the clergy who are trying to implement a liberating ministry that will help build God's kingdom on earth and give real and permanent validity to human rights in El Salvador»⁸. (Applause)

Doctor Roberto Cuéllar, the director of the Legal Aid Office, continues to suffer psychological harassment. Again I want to ask everyone to appreciate the valuable service our Legal Aid Office is providing; trying to obstruct its work is frankly just another form of persecuting our people.

The director of our station YSAX is also being harassed. I wish to express to him my support and my best wishes for the progress the radio is making. In this regard, keep in

⁷ «Statement of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador Regarding the Homily Given by Bishop Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio of San Vicente», 21 September 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (22 September 1979).

⁸ *Ibid.*

mind the new Catholic programs that our radio station is trying to produce. I'll mention them another day, or you can read about them in *Orientación*.

I'd like to register a protest against the coarse joke played by some graduates of the Liceo Salvadoreño; they went to two schools, the Guadalupano and La Asunción, where they frightened the girls. The present circumstances and the mental state of our people are not up to such pranks. I think those boys showed little sensitivity for the moment we're living in. I wish they'd use their youthful daring and energy to undertake a work of true liberation for our people. (Applause) To make matters worse, the newspaper reported this tasteless prank incorrectly and then had to issue a retraction because it didn't happen the way it was reported⁹. Lies and fabrications end up destroying themselves.

Turning now to the church at the universal level, let us pray earnestly for the pope's trip to the United States. You've already read in the newspapers how badly they're misinterpreting the pope's trip. They're reporting that he's making a political journey in order to support Kennedy, but the pope is far removed from such things! I feel consoled by the thought: «If they say this about the green wood, what will they say about the dry?» (Luke 23:31).

The front page of one paper states that the pope censured the Jesuits¹⁰. Someone might say that I don't talk about such news because it's inconvenient. Not at all. In my pastoral letter I state that the church has sinners among her members and that her work is always one of penance and purification¹¹. So it would not surprise me to hear the pope reproaching the Jesuits, but what I find offensive is that the press should manipulate this news item so as to misinform readers. The paper says that the Jesuits were censured for defects, but it doesn't explain what the defects were. Once there is clarification, the news loses its punch. Since we always try to be objective, we'll wait for the further information we've already requested, and we'll certainly be frank in speaking about this matter. For my part, though, I want to state that here in the archdiocese the Society of Jesus is doing work that is very helpful for the church and for the liberation of the people, and I believe that they deserve our full support here in the archdiocese. (Applause)

Events of the week

As regards civil society, we could characterize this week as a week of pronouncements, and there have been some very valuable pronouncements indeed.

ANEP recognized that «only by creating a climate of freedom and peace will we be able to achieve a credible democratic process and true participation of the citizens in that process»¹².

⁹ *Diario Latino* (17 and 19 September 1979).

¹⁰ *La Prensa Gráfica* (22 September 1979).

¹¹ *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 22.

¹² «Statement of the National Association of Private Enterprise» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (20 September 1979).

AGEUS stated that in last few months, far from such a climate being created, «the economic, political, and social crisis has deteriorated», and they enumerated some of the principal repressive actions that have occurred recently¹³.

In this regard, I want to stress something I mentioned last week but then reflected further about how serious the matter was. Regarding the massacre during the demonstration on September 14 and the killing of the students on the excursion in El Cuco, I feel that those responsible have much to reflect on. If there is no freedom to demonstrate, if people are repressed with such awful violence and bloodshed, what can people expect? What confidence can people have in the democratic opening that is so much talked about?

(Applause)

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry has also cited important articles in our constitution and has urged that they be observed¹⁴. I believe we have here a key to the solution: a return to constitutionality. Thanks be to God, our constitution is a good one even though it's evolving and can still improve. I believe that if it's trampled on, however, as is the case now, then we will be a people without law. A return to the constitution would be a step toward civilization. We are therefore in agreement with this call for constitutionality. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry also makes a bold proposal, calling for «a change in the traditional regimen of holding power and the adoption of civic values that offer a real possibility of giving a more solid democratic orientation to our public life»¹⁵. (Applause)

The Association of Small Textile Industries lent its support to the pronouncement of FENAPES, stressing among other things that there be a truce between the forces of the extreme right and those of the extreme left¹⁶. That would be marvelous, as long as the truce isn't just a passive ceasefire but leads us at least to begin the change of structures that is so urgent. If the truce is taken advantage of to initiate in earnest the changes that people everywhere are asking for, then I think it would bring an end to much of the violence, for the violence is mainly a reaction against the failure to bring about the changes that are so urgently needed in the country.

I conclude, therefore, that all these published manifestos, which point out excellent and reasonable paths to follow, should not be content simply to propose theories. What I would ask of all the organizations that have made statements is that they begin to offer concretely whatever they can. They should indicate not only what needs to be done but what they can offer now, because the matter is urgent. Every hour it's a little later in the day, and time becomes more pressing. But we still have time for reasonable solutions.

So I'm delighted to receive a copy of the common platform that was drawn up in the dialogue with the people, and I want to thank the thoughtful people who gave it to me. The dialogue involved political parties, people's organizations, labor unions, and others¹⁷. The

¹³ «The General Association of Salvadoran University Students on the Present Situation of Repression in the Country» in *El Diario Latino* (19 September 1979).

¹⁴ «The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of El Salvador on the Present Situation» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (19 September 1979).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *El Diario de Hoy* (20 September 1979).

¹⁷ «Common Platform of the People's Forum», *ECA 371* (1979) 843-845, and *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 September 1979).

platform contains the points on which they agreed with regard to seeking a democratic solution to the present political crisis of the country. I think this is the first stone to be laid, as they themselves said when they gave it to me. Our Salvadoran people have a true love of peace. They know how to fight too, as Medellín said of Christians generally (M 2,15), but they prefer the paths of peace. This platform can help us to move beyond theories and take concrete steps, to which all those organizations making pronouncements this week can contribute. If that happens, sisters and brothers, then I believe we can still find our way to peace and justice without having to pay a high price in blood, such as will happen if all peaceful means are exhausted and an insurrection breaks out. The peaceful means are still not exhausted, and I think the pronouncements of these organizations and the elaboration of this common platform are inviting us to collaborate generously and magnanimously in the reconstruction of our country. This reconstruction is one that a truly authentic Salvadoran people can bring about—not with blood but with reason, faith, and Christian hope.

Accordingly, I want also to offer some criticism of the results of the so-called National Dialogue. The conclusions are deplorable!¹⁸ They make it clear that there is no true desire for making the changes the country needs. It's not enough just to listen to those who think the way you do. You have to open your ears and listen to the anguished voices of the people, and these can be heard perfectly in the many demonstrations. If those voices are not heard by the ones who should hear them, then violence will result. And so I repeat that we urgently need to come to a rational understanding before people resort to solutions that bring on bloodshed and sorrow.

I'm happy that several problems have already been resolved—for example, the problem of the buses after a six-day stoppage. I cordially congratulate our dear people for their efforts in overcoming the difficulties. Despite the trouble, I think we all had a good laugh and were impressed by the service provided by the trucks and pick-ups, which did a good job in transporting people. Someone told me, «I think we shared our joys and problems riding in the pick-ups more than we did when riding on the buses».

At the same time, I want to express my solidarity with those who have suffered the loss of their buses as a result of past violence. I mention the sorrowful case of José Besty Parada Alas, who had a bus on route 30 in which he had placed all his hope. They set fire to his bus, which had cost him 118,000 *colones*, a large part of which he still owed; he's struggling to see if he can salvage something so that he can continue working. We cannot ignore these situations. I believe that the factions that carry violence to such extremes must reconsider their strategy. That is no way to help the people; it just makes them worse off. They must learn an appropriate language so that they are heard by the people; they must make their liberation appealing to the people.

I've done everything possible on my part to help the families who have come to me pleading for the hostages at Cartotécnica and Arco Ingenieros, and our Legal Aid Office has good news in this regard. As I said before, given this new tactic of taking hostages during the strikes, I am asking those responsible to proceed in a truly humane manner. There is a need to humanize the movement for justice in the country. It should not be a savage movement but a movement that truly loves the people and seeks what is best for the people. It should be a movement that takes into account those who have lost their freedom and been humiliated in

¹⁸ *La Prensa Gráfica* (21 September 1979).

prison. Let us respect them because, as Christ said about children, they represent our human feebleness.

The agricultural business associations have reported that some sixty percent of the 481,000 houses of *campesinos* that they surveyed are lacking in adequate hygiene or security. They are proposing to build 200,000 new houses¹⁹. May God grant that this proposal be truly an improvement for our poor *campesinos* and not just a new way to make money by exploiting them.

There has been an increase in the political-military attacks against the armed forces and security guards. The casualties this week included six guerrillas killed, four agents killed and four wounded, and two passersby wounded.

More people have been kidnapped, and we feel sorry for their fate and the suffering of their families. James Batlle was kidnapped on September 13, and Dennis McDonald on September 21²⁰. Mardoqueo Arnoldo Castillo, a bookkeeper for the municipality of Apaneca, and José Obdulio Borja, fourth alderman in the same municipality, were kidnapped on September 20, as was the youth Roberto Renderos, son of the foreman of an estate in Apaneca.

Finally, you all already know that the February 28 People's Leagues have seized the Ministry of Labor. They are demanding a solution to the labor conflicts, freedom for several detained workers, and a satisfactory resolution of the case of Andrés de Jesús Aguirre, who was arrested in Armenia. May the Lord grant that this seizure not result in another flare-up of violence, because the security forces are already closing in and are using teargas. Our people have already suffered enough!

What's at the root of all this, I think, is the urgent need to root out the basic causes of all our problems. I'll never tire of saying this: if we truly want to put an effective stop to violence, we must remove the structural violence that is causing all the other forms of violence; we must eliminate social injustice and repression, and we must allow our citizens to participate in the public governance of the country. Those are the primordial causes of violence, and naturally they give rise to all the other problems. This dialogue of violence must be terminated and replaced by the dialogue of reason. The manifestos and other statements issued this week are for me a sign of hope. I want to encourage this effort of analysis and see it carried further into an effort of generosity. There was a bishop or cardinal in Italy a little before the war—I don't remember his name right now; he used to tell the Italians of his diocese: *Spogliatevi; se non, vi spoglieranno*, which means, «Divest yourselves in time. Otherwise, they'll divest you!» That is just what the church is saying: «Be generous! What can you contribute? You can't go on selfishly enjoying what belongs to everybody». Let us all participate; let us all share as sisters and brothers. There is still time to resolve our problems with charity and love, with justice and reason. Otherwise they will divest us forcefully, and then there will be bloodshed. Those victories are very costly. Let us hope that we don't come to that.

¹⁹ *El Diario de Hoy* (21 September 1979).

²⁰ McDonald was general manager of Aplard de El Salvador, a firm located in the free zone of San Bartolo, Ilopango. He was kidnapped along with the Ecuadorian citizen Fausto BuchelliVerdesoto. Several days later the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC) claimed responsibility. *El Diario de Hoy* (25 September 1979).

I come to an end now by synthesizing the thoughts of this homily. Christ is revealing to us today the true grandeur of our humanity: even though persecuted, we live justly, we serve others in love, and we open ourselves to the great dimensions of the Absolute. The wisdom that makes people wise on earth can come only from God. Let it be so. (Applause)