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CHRIST, THE LIVING BREAD THAT GIVES LIFE TO THE WORLD

**Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ
28 May 1978**

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14b-16a

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

John 6:51-59

My dear brothers and sisters, Thursday of this week was the proper day to celebrate Corpus Christi according to the official calendar of the universal church. The bishops of El Salvador, however, like those of other countries, have asked permission from the Holy See to transfer these very important feasts of the Lord to the following Sunday so that all those who can assist at Mass on Sunday but not during the week are able to receive the valuable message of these liturgical feasts. The liturgical feast transferred to this Sunday is called the feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord. Usually we refer to this feast as «Corpus Christi» which are Latin words that mean «Body of Christ». Since today is the feast of the Body and Blood of the Lord, we are going to call this homily, «Christ, the Living Bread that Gives Life to the World».

Because that is what the Eucharist is. What is the Eucharist? It is the sacrament or mystery of Christ's presence under the appearances of bread and wine. A sacrament is an external sign that our senses are able to perceive, such as the bread and wine that we can touch and taste. Our senses grasp the reality of a sign, but then through faith we discover an interior element, what is signified by the sign. It's like when we see smoke coming from behind a wall. We see only the smoke, which is the sign, but then our knowledge tells us: there is a fire; something is burning there. The reality is the fire; the sign is the smoke. So also, the sign is the bread and the wine. Saint Thomas says that the senses perceive the taste of bread and wine, but our faith believes firmly that there is no longer present in this taste of bread and wine what the philosophers call substance, that is, what makes this bread be bread. There remain only the accidents, but the substance has been transformed into the true presence of the Lord¹.

The Body and the Blood of the Lord are the reality that is hidden or enclosed in the visible sign. Therefore, when the priest consecrates the Body and Blood of the Lord, there occurs what in theology is called transubstantiation. That means that the substance of bread and wine has been replaced by the real presence of Christ. Christ becomes really and truly and substantially present in that host that continues to taste like bread and in that chalice that continues to taste like wine. But now we are no longer dealing with bread and wine, for the Lord is already present. This is the mystery we celebrate today.

Hopefully, sisters and brothers, as we reflect on this in light of God's word, our faith in the Eucharist will grow this morning so that our attendance at Mass is not simply a routine act.

¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologica*, 3, q.75, art.10.

We should not come to Mass because of some custom or out of curiosity, but we should be motivated to come each Sunday in order to encounter this great mystery of the presence of the Lord. When we leave Mass, we will hopefully be like Moses when he came down from Sinai; his visage became luminous because he had been in the presence of God (Exod 34:29-30). Even though people outside the church attempt to disturb our serenity, I beg you to reflect on how every Sunday we truly have this good fortune. The three readings of today convince us of this.

In the first reading from the Old Testament we see how God's interventions, as the Israelites journey in the desert, prefigure the reality that we Christians experience in the Eucharist. All of this is prefigured in the history of that pilgrimage through the desert. The second idea is this: this prefiguring or prophecy of the Old Testament is fully realized in Christ who becomes present in the host. The second reading and especially the gospel of Saint John speak to us about this idea. The third reflection we draw from these readings is that this Eucharist which brings us together and keeps us united as Christians is the nourishment and the cohesive force of this community called church. In speaking about this community that is our church here in San Salvador, I will mention some of the historical events through which we have journeyed during the past week, just as the pilgrim people of Israel passed through trying historical circumstances during forty years.

God's interventions through the desert pilgrimage prefigure the Eucharist

First of all, chapter eight of Deuteronomy, from which the first reading is taken, speaks about a solemn moment in the history of the Exodus. After Moses established the covenant between God and the people there on Mount Horeb, the people began their forty-year journey through the desert. At the end of the journey we find ourselves on another mountain, Mount Moab, where Moses reminds the people of the temptations and difficulties they encountered during their forty years in the desert. As he looks toward the future when they will enter the Promised Land, Moses exhorts the people to be faithful to this God who has accompanied them on their journey. This is the solemn moment when Moses, reviewing the long history of the Exodus, looks forward with hope to the future history of Israel. The new covenant of the Old Testament reminds the people of the temptations they underwent and the reasons why God put them to the test, but it also speaks about God's interventions on behalf of this people.

First, the temptations. Moses reminds the people how they were delivered from slavery. They were Pharaoh's slaves, a people submitted to humiliation. But that enslaved people was freed by Moses thanks to divine interventions: the eight plagues of Egypt tried to convince Pharaoh, but like all tyrants he was hard to convince. Then came the greatest punishment, the death of the firstborn children of Egypt. That's when the people left Egypt and began their very difficult journey. In the reading today Moses reminds the people, «Remember how you were hungry and blasphemed and longed to return and eat the onions in Egypt?» (Exod 16:3). It seems they preferred slavery. How difficult it was for Moses to convince these people who were on their way to freedom but didn't want to feel the pain of freedom. «Do you remember the thirst you felt», Moses says to them, «and how you put God to the test when you blasphemed against him? You asked, "Why did you make us leave Egypt? Was it just to have us die here of thirst in the desert?" And do you remember especially the harsh desert through which we journeyed? What barren lands and without a drop of water! What desert creatures: scorpions and serpents!» (Exod 17:3; Deut 8:15). These are the temptations and the trials of the journey. Moses explains to the pilgrims the reasons why they went through these trials,

why God allowed this: «He did it to test you by affliction and find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments» (Deut 8:2).

Let us not forget this, sisters and brothers. The words we hear today are the answer to many difficult, repugnant situations of history. Like Moses, let us raise questions when there are tribulations in society and when we find ourselves, as in these days, on a dead-end street: «Why does God permit this?» Moses reminded the people: «To test you by affliction, to discover your intentions» (Deut 8:2). Difficulties are the touchstones for revealing the fine gold of true men and women, of true Christians. So it is that today also there are people who blaspheme and speak against God and his kingdom, against Moses who guides them; they prefer to live in ease and comfort even if it means being slaves.

How difficult it is to understand that the tests of God and the difficulties of the journey are the coins with which we buy liberty, dignity, the joy of being free. «Remember», Moses told the people in the end, «that your trials were lessened by divine interventions. These made us aware that God was also there to protect us». Moses then reminded them that God had truly rescued them from Egypt: «This is the reality: we escaped from that slavery. And when we were suffering hunger and thirst and the anguish of solitude in the wilderness, God was there with us» (Deut 8:11-20).

Here then we see wondrous sacramental signs, and we see how the presence of God is revealed under sacramental signs. Moses mentions four of them.

First there was the cloud that shielded them from the sun. The book of Exodus speaks about a cloud in which God was present, a cloud that refreshed the people amidst the heat of the desert sun (Exod 13:21).

Moses reminded the people that when they were hungry, they awoke in the morning and found outside their tents a mysterious substance that made them ask, «*Man hu?*» which is Hebrew for «What is this?» (Exod 16:15). The word «manna» was really a question, but it was the word the people used to describe the mysterious foodstuff God sent to satisfy their hunger. Manna was a sacramental sign.

When the people were dying of thirst, God commanded Moses to strike the rock with his mysterious rod, and water flowed from the rock. This water slaked the thirst of all, including the animals they had brought with them (Exod 17:6). According to a rabbinical legend, that rock always accompanied the pilgrim people, and whenever they were thirsty, Moses struck the rock and water burst forth. This was another sacramental sign of God's presence in the midst of his people.

Still another sign was the sea. The sea opened wide to let the people escaping from slavery pass through it, but as soon as Israel had passed, the sea closed again over the Egyptian armies, which perished (Exod 14:21-22). Once the Israelites were on the other side, Moses chanted, «Let us sing to the Lord, for he is gloriously triumphant and has freed his people» (Exod 15:1).

Here you see the sacramental signs. What is important for the Bible is not the cloud or the manna or the sea or the rock. What is important is something much greater: the presence of God. That's why Deuteronomy is the source for the words Christ spoke when he was tempted

in the desert: «Learn that not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord» (Deut 8:3). This is a classic text in the Bible, so much so that it expresses the whole theology of the word of God. When the readers at this ambo read the Bible, they conclude by saying, «The word of God». When the Israelites experienced hunger and Moses wanted to assure them of God's protection, he told them, «Now you see that not by bread alone does man live». We do not live just by the food of Egypt or by the food we create with our own hands. God speaks a creative word, a word that produces bread, a word that can change the desert stones into bread, an all-powerful word, a word that becomes a divine person, the Son of God, the Word. And this Word becomes incarnate and is Jesus Christ (John 1:14). This is what is most important: these sacraments contain the all-powerful Word of God.

The prefiguring of the Old Testament is fully realized in Christ, present in the host

My second thought I take from the second reading. In writing to the Corinthians, Saint Paul tries to explain to them the same reality that Moses proclaimed to the people of Israel. Moses, however, knew of Christ only as a future promise. Paul did not know Christ personally either, for he persecuted him, but when he was converted, he discovered who Christ is. In this beautiful letter to the Corinthians he says, «I am going to tell you about what I received from those who had the honor to eat and drink and talk and walk with Christ: he instituted this sacrament so that the bread might become his body and the wine his blood» (1 Cor 11:23).

All the things that happened to Moses and his people as they journeyed through the desert happened as examples, as prefiguring, as prophecy, as promise (1 Cor 10:6). But now we Christians have the fulfillment of this promise and this prophecy. Saint Paul teaches us here that two particular signs of the desert—the rock from which God made water flow and the manna which satisfied their hunger—are the ones that prefigure this great sacrament of the Eucharist.

When Saint Paul wrote this passage, he was already celebrating Mass with bread and wine, for he lived some thirty years after Christ. Keep this in mind: thirty years after Christ first celebrated the Eucharist, Paul wrote with a fresh memory of how Christians were coming together to celebrate the Eucharist in those early times. He shows us that they were celebrating in the same way we do today, on this Sunday, May 28, 1978. Naturally, there were no churches then, but there were followers of Christ, and Paul taught those communities the meaning of their gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist.

In the first place, we are nourished with the word of God. The Eucharist was always celebrated after a reading from the Bible and a homily in which the apostle, the bishop, or the priest prepared the people in spirit to celebrate this Word that becomes the presence of God: the Eucharist. You heard today in Saint Paul's letter how he stresses Christ's presence in the host: «The cup of blessing—does it not unite us in the Blood of Christ?» In the Blood of Christ! «And the bread we share, the host of wheat, does it not unite us all in the Body of Christ?» (1 Cor 10:16). These words of Saint Paul teach us very clearly that the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are present in the sacramental signs of the chalice and the host. We have just read a short passage from this letter, and as always I urge all of you to read the whole of the tenth and eleventh chapters of the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians, where the Mass is described in marvelous terms.

We are told that the Corinthians had been converted from paganism, from the worship of false gods and idols to which they offered sacrifices, but after becoming Christians and assisting at Mass, they wanted to participate once again in those former sacrifices. This was a horrible return to idolatry. Why? Because they have eaten the flesh of Christ offered to them in the Eucharist, and so they have participated in the life of Christ, for Christ is present there. After doing this, Saint Paul says, they should not gather again around idolatrous altars because that meant taking part in the idols. Since these idols were false gods inspired by the devil, then eating meat sacrificed to these idols was like dining with the devil (1 Cor 10:21).

Sisters and brothers, we can certainly apply these words to our life today. Those idols of the Corinthians do not exist today—the golden images of animals, of women, of sun and stars—but there are other idols that we have denounced on many occasions. If Christians are nourished by communion in the Eucharist and their faith tells them that they are united to the life of Christ, how can they worship the idol of money or power or their own ego? How can a Christian who receives Communion become an idolater? Unfortunately, sisters and brothers, there are many who receive Communion and are still idolaters. In this twentieth century, in this very year, Saint Paul could repeat his message to the many Christians reflecting on this word in San Salvador and in the communities: if you truly believe that Christ is present and that you become united with him at the time of Communion, how is it possible that you still live such immoral, selfish, unjust, and idolatrous lives? How is it possible that you place more trust in the things of earth than in the power of Christ who becomes present in this great sacrifice?

Let us continue to analyze this presence of Christ as it is proclaimed in today's readings. In the gospel Christ himself draws his life from the Father. There is a current of life between God the Father and God the Son: «As I have life because of the Father, so those who eat this Eucharist will have life because of me» (John 6:57). What a wonderful gift the Eucharist is! When we receive Communion today, we should hear these words of Christ: «At this moment when you're receiving the sacred host, you're being nourished by my very life. I received this life from the Father so that the Father, you, and I share one single life. Just as you had to purify and free yourself from your sins to be worthy to share in this divine life, so my eucharistic presence is the great liberating power».

Let us not forget this, dear sisters and brothers. At this time when there are so many forces struggling for the temporal liberation of humankind, our Christian liberation has its starting point here in the Eucharist, in the redeeming power of Christ. Our liberation first of all seeks to free us from sin. If we are not freed from sin, if we are not identified with the divine power that unites Christ to the Father, the Creator, then we cannot be effective liberators. That is why the church bases her liberation, her denunciations, and her proclamations on this perspective of faith in God's life. If Christians distort this liberation and forget about God's grace and living in communion with Christ, then they are not Christian liberators.

There is another aspect to this presence of Christ, namely, a priestly aspect. Christ becomes present in the host as a priest for humanity. Read, for example, the Apocalypse or the letter to the Hebrews. What beautiful descriptions of the worship Christ renders to the Father in the name of all humanity! How is Christ exercising his priesthood here on earth? Right here: in the Eucharist. It is precisely this consecrated host of our Mass that unites this pilgrim people that is still on its way, traveling through the arid desert of the Exodus amid serpents and scorpions, but moving ever closer to the promised land. On the altar of our Mass Christ

becomes gloriously present, together with our sisters and brothers who have already entered the promised land.

How beautiful the Mass is, especially when celebrated in a cathedral filled as ours is every Sunday, or when celebrated simply in village chapels with people full of faith! These people know that Christ, the King of Glory, the Eternal Priest, is gathering together all that we bring him from our week: our sorrows, failures, hopes, plans, joys, sadness, pain. How many things, sisters and brothers, each of you brings him in your Sunday Mass! And the Eternal Priest gathers them in his hands and, by means of the human priest who is presiding, he lifts them up to the Father as the fruit of the labor of all these people. United to my sacrifice present on this altar, the people are divinized. Then they leave the cathedral to continue to work and struggle and suffer, but always united with the Eternal Priest who remains present in the Eucharist so that we can meet him again another Sunday. The Mass is beautiful as a sacrifice, but it is not some human invention. As we are taught in today's readings, it is a presence invented by Christ.

Christ is here among us as food and as Communion. Christ is food. That's what he told the people who heard him in Capernaum. In chapter six of Saint John we have the magnificent sermon that Christ gave after the multiplication of the loaves, when the people wanted to make him king. Christ told them, «Do not seek me for bread that perishes. I am the bread that gives eternal life. You seek to satisfy the hunger and thirst you feel by merely human means that are sometimes violent, cruel, political—that is not the way. I offer you true life, the life you need to be effective in your work as politicians, sociologists, business people, professionals, students, and laborers. I give you true life. I am the bread that has come down from heaven, and those who eat of this bread will live forever» (John 6:27,51).

Christ was very careful to avoid being misunderstood, because people were thinking about cannibalism when they asked, «How can we eat his flesh? We're not cannibals; we don't eat people» (John 6:52). Christ told them, «That's not what I mean. I am the living bread. I will rise, and this mortal body will be transformed into a spiritual body. I will be present in the Christian communities, not giving my flesh physically, but sharing it in the mystery of the Eucharist. Yes, it will be a corporal presence visible to eyes of flesh, but it will be a spiritual body, the mystery of the Mystical Body». It is true, as the catechism tells us, that when we receive the host we receive Christ whole and entire, glorious as he is in heaven. It is the risen, living Christ, Christ the living bread who comes down from heaven. He is the one who nourishes us in this way and makes us a true community.

The Eucharist is the food and the power uniting the community

I now share my final reflection with you: Christ is the food and the power binding our community together. In the second reading today, Saint Paul says, «We, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread» (1 Cor 10:17). What a beautiful expression of the unity of Christians!

Our unity, beloved brothers and sisters, is not based on earthly ideals. When people in this world propose an ideal to others, they ask, «Who wants to join me in making this ideal real?» Many will follow the ideal, but it's an ideal that depends on a person, and when the person or the ideal disappears or is betrayed, everything collapses. But Christ possesses a much more vigorous power, a divine power that no one can destroy. He gives us his Body and

his Blood, his risen presence, his life of God. Blessed are the people of faith who discover that Christ is the reason for their being. They place all their trust in Christ and receive Communion. All of us who are going to receive Communion this morning will feel this reality. Even though we are many and perhaps don't know one another, even though we come from different directions and live in places far apart, nevertheless we are one body because we are nourished by the one bread.

The early Christians rejoiced in this comparison. They spoke about how the grains of wheat were gathered from different hillside fields and then molded together into a single loaf that later became the one Christ. So also, we who are from different countries, different races, and different categories are like those grains of wheat. Gathered together in our faith, molded by love and hope, and united to Christ in the Eucharist, we are no longer separated from one another. We are now one single people, the people of God nourished by the presence of the Lord.

This presence of Christ is translated into reality for today's women and men, especially for you lay people who are not priests or religious, you who are married and have jobs and live in this world. Listen to what the Second Vatican Council says about lay people in section 38 of *Lumen Gentium*: «Each individual layman must stand before the world as a witness to the resurrection and life of the Lord Jesus and a symbol of the living God. All the laity as a community and each one according to his ability must nourish the world with spiritual fruits. They must diffuse in the world that spirit which animates the poor, the meek, the peacemakers—whom the Lord in the Gospel proclaimed as blessed. In a word»—here the Council cites a text from the first centuries of Christianity—«Christians must be to the world what the soul is to the body» (LG 38).

You will leave this cathedral today, sisters and brothers, with faith that has been illumined by the presence of Christ on our altar, and those of you who have taken Communion will leave filled with the Spirit of Christ. When will the day come when all who come to Mass are so united with God that they abandon completely the sins and passions and madness of this world? When will people be so identified with God that, after leaving the cathedral or parish churches or wherever the Eucharist is celebrated, they become the soul of the world and a eucharistic leaven in their families, their professions, their work, and their social life? We need many such Christians, Christians who truly live the Eucharist.

The feast of Corpus Christi reminds us specifically of our duty in this aspect of our faith. If we truly believe that Christ, in the Eucharist of our church, is the living bread that nourishes the world, and if we believe that, as Christians who believe and receive the host, we are instruments who should make this Eucharist present in the world, then we have a responsibility to be a leaven in society and to transform this ugly world. That would certainly mean changing the face of our country, for we would really have to inject the life of Christ into our society, our laws, our politics, and all our relations. Who is going to do this? You are! If you as Salvadoran Christians don't do it, then don't expect El Salvador ever to get better. El Salvador will be leavened with divine life, with the kingdom of God, only if the Christians of El Salvador decide to live their faith less languidly, less fearfully, less timidly. I think it was Saint John Chrysostom who said, «When you take Communion, you receive fire, and you should go

forth breathing happiness with strength to transform the world»². May our Communion on this feast of Corpus Christi, sisters and brothers, truly transform us into the power of God.

Life of the church

Since this is the life of our community I want now to look briefly at this community that lives by the Eucharist.

It gives me great joy to receive telegrams from distant communities, such as this one from Las Flores in Chalatenango: «We are celebrating Corpus Christi very solemnly and with great crowds. Many come in pilgrimage asking God for rain. There is a great demonstration of faith and love for the Blessed Sacrament». We have received news of this devotion to the Eucharist in the towns, and I personally have witnessed it.

This week the seminary celebrated Corpus Christi on Thursday. The young men paused the procession of the Blessed Sacrament at various altars where they developed these thoughts: «the Eucharist, the life of God in us»; «the bread of fellowship»; «the new covenant»; «sacrifice-sacrament»; «bread of the poor»; «social commitment». I make mention of this so that you can see what is being taught in the seminary. This is the faith that these future priests will some day proclaim. This has to be said very clearly since there are tendencies so criminal as to claim that the seminary is a school for guerrilla fighters³. The seminary is a school of apostles where they learn to proclaim this great truth that our strength is in Christ. This week the seminarians had a wonderful experience of this kind of Christian education.

I also visited other communities and experienced their fervor as they gathered around the altar for Mass. It is not true, sisters and brothers, that the faith is dying. Today more than ever the Eucharist is being experienced as a commitment with Christ and not as some superficial devotion or tradition. For example, on May 16 in the village of El Zonte in Chiltiupán I celebrated the feast of the Virgin of the Forlorn. What great fervor exists in that community!

On May 23 I celebrated the Eucharist in El Carmen in Cuscatlán and blessed the newly renovated church. There I saw the example of a man who is a faithful priest even in old age. Our beloved Father Miguel Rodríguez, surrounded by young priests and others, joyfully offered the Lord the rehabbed church. Together with his people he received the bishop with respect and love, and there we offered the Eucharist to the Lord, knowing that he is the center and the force of our unity. I want to thank especially the teachers and students, the young people, the Christian associations, and the parish committee for their efforts in maintaining this enthusiastic faith in the Eucharist.

I also celebrated Mass in the parish of María Auxiliadora on May 24. I enjoyed there the spirit of Don Bosco who combined in his saintly heart the three great loves that he called the three whitenesses. There is the whiteness of the Eucharist—how many Communions, what eucharistic fervor in that church! There is the whiteness of the Virgin under the title of Mary Help of Christians—what a powerful magnet for attracting the attention of the Blessed Virgin Mary! It was especially so that morning when thousands of young people attended Mass and

² JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homily on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, 82, 5.

³ A statement signed by the «Committee in Support of a New Catholic Church» accused Archbishop Romero of using the Seminary of San José de la Montaña as a base to support the occupation of churches and embassies. See *La Opinión* (April 1978).

were nourished by the Eucharist celebrated in honor of Mary Help of Christians. And the third whiteness is that of the pope; faithfulness to the pope is also a sign of our Catholicism, which we are trying to live as intensely as possible.

While speaking about the Eucharist, I want to remind you that at 5:00 o'clock on the first day of each month—and therefore this week—there is always Corpus Christi in the lovely chapel of the Divina Providencia Hospital, where a Holy Hour is celebrated to pray for the needs of our archdiocese and the world. I invite you to join us on the first of June at 5:00 o'clock in the afternoon in the chapel of Divina Providencia Hospital.

Regarding the whiteness of the pope, sisters and brothers, I also want to invite the whole diocese to prepare to celebrate the day of the pope as a true feast of the church. The day of the pope is the day when the present pope was crowned as pontiff. Our pope, Paul VI, was crowned on June 30. Therefore at this time I want to invite all the parishes and communities to this celebration. Begin preparing an enthusiastic celebration of the day of the pope, which will be on June 30. Later we'll give you more details.

This week is special for commemorating the love of Christ, and so I announce the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to our community that believes in Christ. You know that in San Salvador we have a monument of our devotion to the Sacred Heart, namely, the Sacred Heart Basilica located on Calle Arce. There on Friday, June 2, we will celebrate the Eucharist at 6:00 o'clock in the evening. Hopefully we will see this great church of the basilica filled with people to celebrate in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Also in honor of the Virgin and her immaculate whiteness, all members of the Legion of Mary are invited to come this morning at 10:30 to the basilica, where their annual meeting called *Acies*⁴ will be held. For my part, sisters and brothers, I invite the whole community of the archdiocese to render homage to Mary as we conclude the month of May. This Wednesday, May 31, we will celebrate Mass here in the cathedral at noon to honor the Virgin with great fervor. I know this month of devotion has been outstanding in many Christian communities. Love of the Virgin, devotion to Our Lady, is far from being outdated; it is a devotion that becomes ever fresher and more tender, and we will demonstrate that next Wednesday.

This church that is having these beautiful and enlivening experiences is the Israel of God, as Saint Paul said (Gal 6:16). She is the spiritual Israel, the people of God, and at the same time she is passing through the arid desert and the trials of life, suffering temptations of hunger and thirst.

Events of the week

Here also we must point out our path through the world. As regards the three kidnappings there is mysterious silence⁵. We unite our voice to the protests and also to those of other groups that have raised their voices.

⁴ *Acies* is a Latin word meaning «an army drawn up for battle». The Legion of Mary uses the term for the annual celebration where its members renew their consecration to the Virgin Mary.

⁵ Archbishop Romero is referring to the kidnappings denounced in the previous homily. The silence was actually not total, since on May 24 the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) issued an announcement claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of Fujio Matsumoto. In exchange for his freedom they demanded the following:

This has also been a week of some very unfair defamation. I want to repudiate the attacks against my fellow prelate, Bishop Aparicio. I also want to express my repudiation of the baseless suspicions that have been leveled against certain priests who work in communion with me. I fully support these priests. We decry the torture inflicted on Father Francisco Mejía Alvarado, and we condemn other abuses committed by the National Guard in the rectory of Cinquera. They said that Father Francisco was no longer a priest because he had been suspended. I want to state here that a priest, even when he is suspended, still maintains his priestly character and that the suspension is a disciplinary penalty imposed by his own bishop. Let us pray to God that this problem in our sister diocese of San Vicente will be quickly resolved⁶. Priests are always priests, and the soldiers who tortured Father Francisco are excommunicated because all those who violently lay hands on a priest are excommunicated by their very actions.

Another biased news item concerns the young man Estefan Turcios⁷. It was reported that he was a seminarian close to ordination and that he was captured committing terrorist and subversive acts. We have stated that he was a seminarian until 1972 and that what is being done to him, whether he is a seminarian or not, is an injustice because he was captured on April 14 while collecting aid for the victims of San Pedro Perulapán. That's all he was doing. He was imprisoned for almost a month before he was handed over to the courts, after being brutally tortured. The newspapers themselves reported that he had to be hospitalized for ten days. That is the truth.

The publication of ORDEN regarding terrorism is a slanderous statement against the church⁸. We want to repeat here that the church, in denouncing the roots of our evils and defending the rights of the people, is neither terrorist nor in connivance with terrorists but is rather simply fulfilling her evangelical obligation. Those groups that want to manipulate the church, whether to slander her or to use her as a cover, are distorting the church's mission. The church's mission possibly coincides with the demands of justice that other groups are making, but these groups are independent of the life of the church. The church seeks justice from the

the release of thirty-eight political prisoners, the repeal of the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order, and a general amnesty. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 May 1978).

With regard to the other two men kidnapped, Ernesto Sol Meza and Luís Méndez Novoa, there was indeed total silence which was not broken until 22 June 1978. At that time the Forces of Popular Liberation (FPL) claimed responsibility for kidnapping both businessmen, and they set them free after their conditions were met, namely, the payment of a large sum of money and the publication of a statement in the principal newspapers of Central America. See *La Crónica del Pueblo* (22 June 1978).

⁶ On 7 March 1978 a group of three hundred priests from all over the country sent a letter to the papal nuncio in El Salvador, Bishop Emmanuel Gerada, questioning his lack of solidarity with the church and the people of El Salvador. As a result, the bishop of San Vicente, Pedro Arnoldo Aparicio Quintanilla, who was also president of the bishops' conference of El Salvador, suspended ten priests of his diocese who had signed the letter to the nuncio. One of the suspended priests was Father Francisco Mejía Alvarado, who eventually offered his pastoral services in Cinquera, Cuscatlán. See «The Church in El Salvador» in *Orientación* (16 March 1978).

⁷ *El Diario de Hoy* published on 23 May 1978 a note with the headline: «Seminarian Accused of Terrorism Captured».

⁸ In a statement titled «Facing Violence: Our Principles and the Fatherland», the Nationalist Democratic Organization (ORDEN) stated the following: «It is intolerable that this wave of violence has found a "breeding ground" in some priests who use their preaching to foment hatred instead of evangelizing; to pit brother against brother instead of promoting understanding. It is therefore reprehensible that some priests—such as Fabián Amaya, Rutilio Sánchez, Benito Tobar, David Rodríguez, Barahona, and others influenced by "communist theology" and inexplicably tolerated by the church hierarchy—use the pulpit to proclaim stridently a Marxist-Leninist message of salvation which aims to destroy religion». See *La Prensa Gráfica* (25 May 1978).

perspective of the light of the Gospel. I want to remind all factions, all political groups, whether subversive or governmental, that they should not manipulate the church for their own ends. They should maintain respect for the autonomy and the evangelical perspective of the church.

I am happy to see that the church's statement concerning the cause of our evils coincides with the words of the United States ambassador, who spoke this week to the Rotary Club. He said. «If change is to come, then it is prudent that we try to channel it in a positive and constructive way. Simply resisting change will achieve nothing positive. Stubborn resistance to inevitable change can bring violent, destructive results. When this happens, all of us end up losing»⁹. We are in agreement with the ambassador, and this is the position of the church. If she points out the need for change, it's because there are many deaf people who don't want to hear anything about the need for change. But the change that is needed will not be achieved just by tolerating the present situation or by saying «Wait». Much less will it be achieved by repressive force, for violence only provokes violence. As the ambassador says, change must come constructively.

We therefore want to express our solidarity with the Universidad Centroamericana and at the same time thank them for their support. We join with them in the call they make, which reads as follows: «We call upon all professionals, cultural institutions, and civic and community associations to engage in serious reflection on the social and moral commitment that we have to reject the institutionalized use of force as irrational and inhumane. Let us unite our efforts to contribute toward a solution of the country's problems»¹⁰.

We end this homily, sisters and brothers, precisely where I wanted to end it, by calling to mind, as Moses did, the journey we have made this week, a journey through arid deserts filled with serpents and scorpions. But God still travels with us, present in the Eucharist.

We are going to celebrate our Mass with the same love and confidence that the people of Israel had when they experienced hunger and thirst, when they felt hopeless in the heat of the desert sun, when they were tempted to curse God and despair. It is natural for us to have these same feelings, but let us always see in the church the sign of God's protection, the rock from which water flows, the bread that God gives us miraculously, the sea that opens before us, the cloud that shelters us, and above all our Eucharist, bread and wine, making Christ present to us. Let us celebrate our Corpus Christi by renewing our trust in this church which does not find support in the powers or idolatries of earth but in the power of the Lord who will never betray our confidence.

With these sentiments of Corpus Christi, I invite the whole community to make every effort to come this afternoon at 4:00 o'clock to render very special honor to our Lord present in the Blessed Sacrament. Please stand.

⁹ Address of Frank J. Devine, ambassador of the United States in El Salvador, to the Rotary Club of San Salvador. See *El Diario de Hoy* (25 May 1978).

¹⁰ Statement by the professors and instructors in the departments of Economics, Letters, Philosophy, Political Sciences, and Sociology of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA), 11 May 1978. See *Orientación* (28 May 1978).