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EASTER IS CELEBRATION OF THE RICHES OF THE NEW COVENANT

Second Sunday of Easter

22 April 1979

Acts 4:32-35

1 John 5:1-6

John 20:19-31

Many of you who are listening by radio have expressed your unhappiness with the broadcast interference on recent Sundays, but I think a notice published in *El Mundo* this past Friday will be good news for you. It's a letter from the president of ANTEL, which says the following: «In compliance with instructions from the President of the Republic and in my position as president of ANTEL, I want to inform you and the citizens of El Salvador, who are deserving of all our respect, that this institution has not interfered in any way with the transmissions of radio station YSAX, as has been maliciously implied by other publications. In this regard, I consider it opportune to inform you that ANTEL, as a state institution charged with technical oversight of the installation and operation of broadcasting equipment—such as radio, sound systems, television, ham radio, and citizen band—has ordered that a careful investigation be conducted by its radio-electronic department to discover who is responsible for the interference mentioned above. When concrete results are obtained, ANTEL will proceed, in accordance with the law, to punish the lawbreakers who have provoked these situations». The letter concludes by stating, «Faithfully following the orders of the national government, I repeat that at no time has this institution violated the right of free expression that is consecrated in our Magna Charta and it is respectful of the rights pertaining to the various means of social communication of the republic».

I am grateful for this statement, and I hope that this promise is effective so that we can now broadcast freely. As ANTEL has just admitted, they have in their hands the power to remedy these outrageous situations when they occur. Let us hope, therefore, that the voice of the pastor can reach the faithful who are interested in hearing his words.

The word today is not mine, and it never has been mine for it is the word of God. All I do is comment on it and apply it to reality. We are celebrating now the Second Sunday of Easter. To grasp the meaning of Easter, we must understand those three great days of Holy Week that are called the paschal Triduum, the time when we celebrate the death and burial and resurrection. Those three aspects—Good Friday, the silence of Saturday, and the joy of the Easter Vigil—determine the nature of our faith for the whole year.

This entire week is called the octave of Easter, and it ends today, Sunday. The Easter season, however, lasts for fifty days. This is now the second of the seven Sundays that comprise the Easter season, which will culminate with the feast of Pentecost. On Pentecost, which means «fifty days», the Holy Spirit comes and the fullness of Easter is achieved.

I want to remind you that we are celebrating Easter every Sunday even when we come to Mass during the ordinary weekly cycle. Every time we Christians meet together for our Sunday Mass, we celebrate those three great events: the death, the burial, and the resurrection of the Lord. Whenever we attend a Mass—even if it's for a wedding, a first communion, or a funeral—we should not forget that we are celebrating Easter. That is why, in the transcendental moment of the consecration, the priest says, «This is the sacrament of our faith». And the people respond with an Easter proclamation: «We announce your death. We proclaim your resurrection. Come, Lord Jesus!» This is the hope that keeps the Christian people alive. Christ lives, and we go forth to meet him. Every Mass that is celebrated is a recalling of that presence and that hope.

The whole liturgical year, dear sisters and brothers, revolves around this mystery. That is why Holy Week, and especially Easter, is like the sun of the whole liturgical year. The meaning of these seven Sundays needs to be engraved deeply in our spirits through a program of preaching, and that is what we tried to do during the whole of Lent. I want you to receive the substance of my preaching of God's word as a form of catechesis. Of course, there are people who are expecting from me polemical arguments and political topics; they think that all my preaching is polemics and politics and that I'm encouraging subversion with my preaching. Sister and brothers, the main aim of my preaching is the proclamation of this mystery.

You'll recall that the main idea that united all the Sundays of Lent was that of God's covenants with humankind. We reviewed the covenants of the Old Testament—Noah, Abraham, Moses, the prophets—until we reached Holy Week. But for our preaching during Holy Week—on Palm Sunday, at the two Masses on Holy Thursday, at the ceremony on Good Friday, at the Easter Vigil, finally last Sunday, the feast of the resurrection—the title we used was «The Celebration of the New Covenant». Now we will continue along the same line, by gathering in the fruits of the new covenant.

Easter is a good moment to spend some time, as the apostles did before the empty tomb, meditating on what it means that a Redeemer who died for us has risen to restore life to us. That restoration of life commits Christians to a series of tasks that must be undertaken as long as they live, for they must reflect on the messianic fruits and gather in the rich harvest of redemption. What the prophets announced in the old covenants consisted mainly of promises and hopes, and that's why the prophets used the more comprehensive term «testament» to characterize the covenant. Thus we have the Old Testament and the New Testament. Saint Paul, in fact, thinking of the death of Christ on Good Friday, stated that «a testament does not have any effect until the testator dies» (Heb 9:16). The title of my preaching on Good Friday was «The Price of the Benefits of the Covenant». Christ had to die; he had to suffer that sentence of death out of obedience. But when he rose after undergoing all his suffering, he presented himself to the Father. Now that the testator had died, the Father granted all the benefits of the testament. That is why our Christian era is called the era of the New Testament, the new covenant. In the course of the coming Sundays we will see the diverse fruits that it brings with it.

On this Sunday, as is my custom, I will give my homily a general title: «Easter is the Celebration of the Riches of the New Covenant». This theme will help us understand the subsequent Sundays in the Easter season. Each Sunday we will examine those riches, those fruits, those treasures of the new covenant, one by one. This Sunday I find in the readings three

great benefits brought by the risen Christ: first, the gift of the Spirit; second, the gift of Christian faith; and third, the gift of the supernatural love that makes us a community of sons and daughters of God.

The gift of the Spirit

As I read the gospel, my first reflection centers on the gesture of the risen Christ who breathed upon the apostles, saying «Receive the Holy Spirit» (John 20:22). It recalls how the eternal Father, in creating humans from the mud of the earth, breathed the spirit of life into them (Gen 2:7). Let us pause and consider how this gesture of Christ resembles the one in Genesis, for Christ is a new creature with a new covenant, and he creates a new Spirit: «Receive the Holy Spirit».

On Holy Thursday night Jesus told his apostles, «It is better for you that I go. Do not be sad, because unless I go, I cannot send you the Holy Spirit» (John 16:7). What Jesus was saying was this: «The Father has given me the condition for restoring to you the divine life that was lost through sin. In order for the Spirit of God to come and revivify humankind, it is necessary that I be raised up after suffering the cross and being buried. And when my humanity, that of this concrete man Jesus of Nazareth, is assumed by the divine and glorified and adored as God, then I, acting as God with the Father, will send you the Spirit of God».

According to the Gospel of Saint John, there was no need to wait for the feast of Pentecost fifty days after the resurrection, for the resurrection of Christ was itself his glorification. In the evening of that same Sunday he rose, Christ appeared with the creative gesture of the new Spirit: «Receive the Holy Spirit» (John 20:22).

What did that Spirit give the newborn community of eleven apostles? The traitor was no longer there, but he would soon be replaced by another, and still others would succeed the apostles, and these would eventually become this community of ours which today fills the cathedral and is listening to us through the radio. We are the community who by the promise and breath of Christ has received the Spirit: «Receive the Holy Spirit». With that breath of Christ the church was born, as Christ himself explained, «As the Father has sent me, so I send you» (John 20:21-22). The mission that the church carries out in the world for all ages is none other than the mission of Christ dead and risen. The church celebrates her liturgy and preaches her word for that reason alone: to save people from sin, to save them from enslavements, to overthrow idolatries, and to proclaim the one God who loves us. This will always be the difficult task of the church, and she realizes that she must never betray his message. Since carrying out this mission cost Christ humiliation and the cross, the church also must be ready if necessary to suffer martyrdom, the cross, humiliation, persecution, as Christ did.

What else can the Spirit give the church besides the life of Christ and the power to forgive? On the very night of the resurrection Christ said, «Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain, they are retained» (John 20:22-23). In other words, only God can forgive sins that offend God, and the church is simply a presence of this merciful God in the world. Just as God forgives those who ask for pardon, so too, Saint Paul tells us, the church is a «minister of reconciliation» (2 Cor 5:18). Over there is the baptismal font for reconciling newborn babies with the grace of God. Over there are the confessionals so that those who are repentant can receive absolution by means of the church,

represented by a priest. When we are told that the Spirit has given the priest the power to forgive, it means that he has also been given the ability to preach conversion, to condemn injustices by name, and to tell sinners, «Be converted because God wants to forgive you». The priest has also been commanded to stand in solidarity alongside those who are suffering and to tell them, «Take heart. God stays with those who follow God». This is the church's mission of forgiveness and reconciliation. Behind her firmness the church is like a mother who is impatient with her children's weaknesses and injustices; she corrects, guides, and orients them to be good sons and daughters worthy of divine adoption.

From today's second reading we learn that the Spirit that Christ has given his church gives true testimony about Christ because it is the «Spirit of truth», as Saint John says in his letter (1 John 5:6). That means that the church, since she is inspired by the Spirit of God, has the capacity for speaking truth, and having the capacity for speaking truth, dear sisters and brothers, means suffering the interior torment that the prophets experienced. For it is much easier to preach lies and conceal the truth; it is much easier to adjust to situations in order to hold on to power, to maintain flattering friendships, and to seek one's advantage. That's the horrible temptation the church must face! She has, however, received the Spirit of truth, and she will never betray the truth. If it is necessary for her to lose all her privileges, she will lose them, but she will always speak the truth. If they slander her, she knows that they do so because she is speaking the truth. This is the mission Christ entrusted to the church on the very night of his resurrection.

There is another capacity that that Spirit gives the church. When John speaks today about the signs of blood and water (1 John 5:6), he is talking about sacramental signs that were familiar to everyone in those ancient Christian communities. They knew about the water that washes away the original sin of the child, about the bread and wine that become the body and blood of the Lord, about the hand of the priest that absolves and anoints. These are the signs of the presence of the Spirit in the church. These are the sacraments that sanctify human beings. These are the sacraments that sanctify all the diverse conditions of human life in the home and in society. Therefore, the Spirit that is breathed forth by Christ gives the church the ability to sanctify, to convert, and to be nourished by the life of God. Let those who are holy become more holy so that every day we become more truly a community that is a people of God pleasing to the Lord.

This is the reason for the church's preaching. Naturally this is very difficult, sisters and brothers, because preaching virtue in the face of vice means entering into conflict with vice. Preaching justice in the face of injustice and brutality means provoking conflict. The Gospel that the church preaches will always provoke conflict. Whenever the church seeks to be faithful to her Founder and to the breath of the Spirit he gave her, she will provoke conflict by bringing his message to the world. By refusing to betray her fidelity to that Spirit, she will lose the advantages given her by a sinful world, but it is better to remain with the Christ who died and then rose again than to enjoy the advantages of Christ's persecutors. They are the ones who lose their lives because they tried to save them in this world (Mark 8:35).

The gift of Christian faith

The second point I want to make about today's readings concerns the gift of faith. That breath of Christ, which is his Spirit given to the church, creates a community of faith. That is what the

church is: a community of faith. That means that a church community is not a community with ideals that are political or subversive or communist or sociological. Rather, the church is guided by the criteria of faith, and these characterize the whole of her life.

Both the story of Saint Thomas and the second reading, which speaks about our relations with God through faith, provide good commentary on the point I'm trying to make. They tell us about the Easter gift of faith, which is the gift of the new covenant, and about believing that Christ is the mediator of this covenant between God and humankind.

What happened with Saint Thomas should interest all of us. When Christ appeared the first time, he did not find Thomas there. When Thomas finally arrived, his fellow apostles told him, «We have seen the Lord. He has risen». But Thomas wanted proof. Observe how similar Thomas's attitude is to the critical spirit of our modern era. Modern technology wants measurements and concrete evidence, and that's what Thomas wanted: «If I don't put my finger into the wound of his hands and if I don't put my hand in his side, I will not believe» (John 20:25). The gospel goes on to tell about what happened «one week later», which was the following Sunday. That's an amazing expression, as though John were canonizing our Sunday gatherings, the same as if I were to tell you today, «Next Sunday we're going to meet», meaning next Sunday's celebration. He continues, «Now one week later they were gathered together, and Thomas was there. Christ presented himself in the midst of them» (John 20:26). Christ then had the qualities of a risen, spiritual body that had no need for doors to be opened. Some people might say that he was a «ghost», but he was not. Indeed, he confronted the incredulous Thomas by saying, «Come, place your finger in my hands; place your hand in my side, and feel that it is I» (John 20:27). The gospel does not tell us whether Thomas touched Christ with his finger and his hand, but it does tell us how he responded in faith. He fell before Christ and uttered the most magnificent cry of faith that is preserved in all the gospels: «My Lord and my God!» (John 20:28). That was faith. There was no need to touch Christ.

Whenever we want proofs, whenever we want to verify the truths of faith, we are imitating the disbelief of Thomas. Christ told Thomas, «Because you have seen, you have believed. Blessed are those who believe without seeing» (John 20:29). You and I, sisters and brothers, live by faith because we believe without having seen. Many will say that such belief is stupid, but I tell them: there is no wisdom greater than the faith that Christ preaches this Sunday. «This is the victory that overcomes the world», Saint John's second letter tells us today, «The victory that overcomes the world is believing that Jesus Christ is God» (1 John 5:5).

The frequencies of YSAX have again been jammed. We regret that ANTEL has still not been efficient enough to correct these things. (Applause) I interpret your applause as a repudiation of this shameful action of refusing us the right to express our faith, for I am doing no more than proclaiming our faith! ... I think the broadcast is now being heard again. I am trying to make this message absolutely evangelical, and I only hope that my words will make everyone reflect on this most precious gift of our religion, the gift of faith.

Believing is not touching; it is not putting one's finger into the wounds of Christ. Believing is not scientific evidence; it is accepting the word of God. Faith means accepting the word of those who experienced what happened at Easter and announced it with such conviction that everyone said, «Christ has risen!» Christ is present through the Spirit that he gave to his church. Christ is alive in the holiness of the people who follow him. Christ is present

in the courage with which his Gospel is preached in the world. Christ is the testimony of the Holy Spirit and of the community that receives him and experiences his presence. This is the faith, sisters and brothers, that bestows beauty on the community of those who join together to meditate on God's word.

Saint John ends his gospel with this sentence: «These words have been written so that you may believe» (John 20:31). The Greek verb used here indicates continuity; it means «so that you may continue to believe, so that you may keep growing in faith». Every Sunday when you attend Mass and the preacher comments on the word of God, or when you reflect on the word in your communities or in your homes, you should read the written Scripture so that your faith keeps growing. The word of the Lord is a leaven that helps us to believe in the true God.

But our faith has a content. When we heard Pope John Paul II speak in Puebla, it seemed to me we were hearing the most beautiful synthesis of the content of faith. He invited the bishops as teachers of the faith to preach «the truth about Christ, the truth about the church, and the truth about humankind»¹. The truth about Christ is what today's gospel now proclaims to us in Thomas's words, «My Lord and my God» (John 20:28), or in those of John, «So that you may believe that Christ is the Son of God» (John 20:31). The second reading... Again there is radio interference, which is a way of telling us that we cannot freely express our faith. And they claim that there is no persecution of the church! This is persecution of the church, not allowing her ministers to preach! (Applause) Among the various kinds of persecution is that of opposing the freedom to preach. It involves preventing the ministers of the word, who are commissioned by Christ to announce his message, from fulfilling their office of preaching. That is real persecution of the church. (Applause)

The gift of supernatural love

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, my third reflection concerns the third Easter gift we receive, the gift of love which helps form the community of God's children. This community is also called the church, which is not only a community of faith but also a community of love. Let us understand what this means.

Today's first reading describes beautifully a community in which all possessions were shared (Acts 4:33-35). Everyone was taken care of and no one suffered need because those who had lands or houses sold them, brought the money, and put it at the disposition of the apostles. The money was then distributed according to the needs of each person. Commentators on this passage say that it is clearly proposing an ideal, one that sometimes was attained. The same book of Acts tells about three extraordinary cases, those of Joseph Barnabas, Ananias, and Sapphira (Acts 4:36; 5:1). In the case of Joseph Barnabas, it was a real act of love that led him to hand over all his possessions to be shared among his brethren (Acts 4:36-37). In contrast, Ananias and Sapphira pretended to do the same but instead lied and cheated. When Peter asked them, «Have you given everything?» they replied that they had. Then Peter told them, «You should not lie to the Holy Spirit» (Acts 5:1-10). To demonstrate to the people of God that they shouldn't be hypocrites, Peter imposed the punishment of immediate death. There was no obligation for Christians to sell their possessions or hand them

¹ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse at the Inauguration of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla», 28 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 February 1979).

over, but those who hypocritically pretended to do so while keeping them for themselves were considered worthy of severe punishment. On the other hand, those who lovingly shared their possessions, even if they didn't surrender their property, helped to eliminate the unjust inequalities in a society that called itself Christian and yet was lacking in the spirit of fraternal love.

This supernatural love is a love that is both affective and effective, as the pope has said. Affective love raises us up to God first and from there descends to love of neighbor. Notice how well balanced Saint John is in this regard. One of his letters says something that we have heard many times: «Those who do not love their brothers and sisters, whom they can see, cannot love God, whom they do not see» (1 John 4:20). But today he says the opposite: «We can be sure that we love God's children if we love God himself» (1 John 5:2). Both things are necessary. Christ said, «The principal commandment is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength", and the second resembles it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"». Loving our neighbor is proof of the love we have for God, and loving God is proof of the love we profess for our neighbor. In a truly Christian heart there cannot be just love for God without love for others, nor can there be just love for others without love for God. The true balance of a community of love is described in the opening words of the Council: «The church is the great sacrament which unites people with God and people among themselves» (LG 1). This is the community which the spirit of love succeeds in creating among Christians.

This love is based on faith in God. Those who have faith in the God who fathers us all will also have faith in the children fathered by God (1 John 5:1). The second reading offers us this comparison to tell us that we should strive to be true children of God. When we pray the Our Father, let no one be excluded from our hearts; let there be no categories dividing people into first and second classes. Rather, let us all rise to the height of God's heart—all of us! It will be a wonderful day when the Spirit's gift of love becomes a reality, for it is love that creates a community of love. In this Easter ambience of the Spirit's gifts of faith and love, I invite you now to consider the events of the week.

Life of the church

Let us first analyze events within the church, which today we have called a community of faith and a community of love. For my part, I can inform you as one returning home that I was meeting this week in Costa Rica with the Central American bishops. There were four from Costa Rica, six from El Salvador, twelve from Guatemala, four from Honduras, three from Nicaragua, and six from Panama. We thought it was important for us as pastors in the region to reflect on the Puebla meeting and the pope's visit to our continent, for these were very significant events for Latin America and their lessons needed to be understood in the context of the realities of our Central American countries. We therefore gave pastoral priority to several areas of study.

One group of bishops studied «the profound ecclesial communion that should be experienced among bishops, priests, religious, and laity»². Another aspect of our meeting concerned «vocational promotion which we must carry on in order to have a sufficient number

² «Press release of the Bishop's Secretariat for Central America and Panama», San José de Costa Rica, 20 April 1979, in *Orientación* (6 May 1979).

of priests and ministers who are prepared for the evangelizing work in the special circumstances of our people»³.

A third aspect studied by the SEDAC in Costa Rica concerned the church's attitude with regard to other Christian denominations and «the profound social-political implications of the numerous sects that constitute a serious threat to the unity of our people»⁴. While we defended true ecumenism and the sincere efforts of Catholics and Protestants to come together, we also said in Costa Rica that there is great danger of division in those sects which are helping to maintain unjust conditions in our countries. They do this not with an ecumenical spirit but with socio-political interests.

Finally we studied «the tense relationship between church and state in most of our countries, where the regimes are inspired by the ideology of national security»⁵.

As you can see, these themes are clearly related to the ecclesial problems and the church's relations with the secular world, especially the governments of Central America. «In all our deliberations we kept in mind that our countries are predominantly Catholic and rightfully expect from the bishops a message that will guide and orient them. This realization increases our sense of responsibility and impels us to point out the paths that will lead our Christian people not only to form lively and active communities but also to search realistically and responsibly for solutions to the grave sociopolitical problems that afflict our nations»⁶.

We further stated that «the church cannot renounce her evangelizing mission which, if it is authentic and genuine, must lead her to defend human rights and to proclaim liberation from every form of slavery, especially sin—and to do so even if the church's protagonism causes her to lose privileges and to suffer persecution and martyrdom»⁷. It is wonderful to find among the bishops of Central America individuals who are highly committed to this line of action that our archdiocese, thank God, is already carrying out.

«Nevertheless»—take note of this—«the church will never support ideologies or methods that utilize class struggle, deceit, or terrorism to achieve their goals. We do not believe in violence of any kind as a suitable way to resolve our countries' problems because we are aware that the Gospel of Christ offers the only valid way to create a just and humane society in which the vital needs of all are satisfied. All the same, it is necessary that all who believe in Christ lay aside selfish and greedy attitudes and work instead for justice using effective and legitimate means. As pastors who are conscious of our mission, which is neither political nor technical but eminently spiritual and religious, we wholeheartedly subscribe to the thought of Puebla and the teaching of the supreme pontiff. Moreover, in our respective dioceses we have committed ourselves to promoting deeper knowledge and concrete application of the major pastoral priorities and options that have been embraced by the church in Latin America. We are confident that this will be our best contribution to the attainment of the peace that is longed for in our countries, a peace that can come only as the fruit of justice

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

and truth»⁸. As you can see, the ideals proposed by our Central American meeting simply reflect the commitments made in Puebla and the teachings of the pope. It is sad to think that many... (Applause)

At this moment when we come together as a community of love, let us remember our sisters and brothers in Nicaragua. When I talked with their bishops, I became aware of how the people there are suffering. Indeed, this very week the pope expressed his concern for the sufferings and privations that the Nicaraguan people have undergone, and he asked all Catholics to pray earnestly for the protection of the regions being threatened with attacks and reprisals⁹. Previously in Puebla thirty bishops of Latin America had expressed their solidarity with the Archdiocese of San Salvador; they also affirmed their solidarity with the people of Nicaragua and said that Nicaragua seemed to them a clear example of martyrdom in which people were being submitted to tyranny of every kind¹⁰. The bishops expressed the desire for a new Nicaragua, a country in which all the people can live in equality and control their own destiny. (Applause) Let us join in joyful communion with our brothers and sisters who are rejoicing, and let us feel the pain of those who are suffering.

I ask for your solidarity, sisters and brothers, with the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation as they celebrate the beatification of their founder, Dominican Father Francisco Coll y Guitart, a Catalonian missionary, who founded this congregation in the last century. These sisters have done marvelous pastoral work here among us. They run the Colegio Nuestra Señora de Fátima in Santa Tecla, the Catholic high school in Suchitoto, the high school in Quezaltepeque, the Escuela San Martín de Porres that is next to the church of El Rosario, and the Escuela Masferrer in Santa Tecla. There in Santa Tecla they also do vocational training, and in Chiltiupán they are involved in missionary pastoral work. As you see, then, these are seven works of the Dominican Sisters that deserve our best wishes and our gratitude at this moment of communion in our archdiocese.

Their founder is going to be the first person beatified by John Paul II, thus showing that his life is worthy of imitation; he was a Christian who reached the kingdom of heaven after leaving behind on earth the beneficial work of the Dominican Sisters of the Annunciation. I personally want to thank the sisters, who have asked me to go to Rome to participate in the beatification next Sunday. And so, with the permission of the community of the archdiocese and with thanks to this invitation of the Dominican Sisters, I will be in Rome next Sunday attending the beatification of Father Coll. (Applause)

Naturally, the great desire of all who go to Rome, especially pastors, is to see the pope. Not only will I see the pope, I will speak with him. I have never been opposed to the pope's position. I follow closely what the pope says. I realize that many denunciations have been lodged in Rome against me. There are many reports claiming that my pastoral approach is distorted. I know that the pope will question me about it, but what I will tell him is this: «Holy Father, you already sent an apostolic visitor¹¹ who was able to speak with many witnesses and

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ «General Audience of 18 April 1979» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (22 April 1979).

¹⁰ «Letter from Several Bishops to Bishop Salazar of León, President of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua», 10 February 1978, *ECA* 365 (1979) 191-192.

¹¹ In December 1978 the Vatican appointed Bishop Antonio Quarracino (ordinary of Avellaneda, Argentina) as apostolic visitor for the purpose of investigating the situation of the Archdiocese of San Salvador and sending a report to the Vatican. After making his visit, Bishop Quarracino recommended that John Paul II appoint an

with the people themselves. I readily submit to whatever Your Holiness may decide. Nevertheless, I want you to know that I have preached the Gospel, and I am ready to continue to preach that Gospel of the Lord in defense of this beloved people that that Lord has entrusted to me». (Applause)

When I return from Rome—I hope the trip will last no more than two weeks—I would like to join with all the Dominican Sisters here in the archdiocese to celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving in honor of Blessed Francis Coll. Thus we'll be able to see how a saint of heaven can carry out works here on earth. This is the image of a church that never forgets the world even after she has scaled the heights of eternity.

Later—that is, after Mass—I will visit San Pedro Perulapán, where we will have an Easter renewal of baptismal promises, and this evening at six-thirty I invite you to celebrate the patronal feast of Resurrection parish. That's the parish in Colonia Miramonte; at six-thirty we will have the Mass for their feast day there.

Events of the week

This church of ours, sisters and brothers, attempts to build a community of faith and love, as I just said in speaking of Father Coll, who from eternity continues his work here on earth. The church cannot fail to be concerned with social, political, and economic affairs. She is not expert in these matters, but she must be a prophetic voice that makes clear to the experts what their duties are as they manage the technical aspects of earthly affairs. In this regard, I want to refer to a news item I found when I returned from Costa Rica.

First of all I read that cotton growers¹², coffee growers in Santa Ana¹³, and people in the henequen industry¹⁴ have requested economic incentives for their investments. They say that without these subsidies they will be unable to plant their fields and carry on their business. This will lead to a greater crisis, especially for all the poor workers who have no other income except that produced by those crops.

Commenting on this situation, I would say that, if the government has the capacity to do so, it has an obligation to provide incentives for everything produced in our country. But I also want to tell the producers that they should not let themselves be swayed only by the logic of the present system, in which investments are not made unless huge profits are expected. They themselves declare that the crisis will affect a lot more than the poor workers. I believe that we need to follow Christian criteria. The Lord is already sending us rain, and we should ask that we have a normal rainy season so that our lands are well watered. In this way the Lord shows that he wants all of us to be happy. What I mean to say, then, is that the cotton growers and the harvesters of henequen, coffee, and other crops should keep in mind the Christian principle that the word of God has announced to us today: we need to share. That is to say, investments should not be made only with the hope of capturing large profits. Even if the profits are not

apostolic administrator *sede plena* to take over the diocese instead of Archbishop Romero. See BROCKMAN J. *Romero: A Life*, Orbis Books 1989, 167.

¹² «Comunicado de la Cooperativa de Productores de Algodón, Ltda. (COPAL)» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 April 1979).

¹³ «Comunicado de la Junta Departamental de Santa Ana de la Asociación de Productores de Café de El Salvador» in *El Diario de Hoy* (18 April 1979).

¹⁴ «Boletín de Información de la Asociación de Productores de Henequén de El Salvador (HENSALVA)» in *El Diario de Hoy* (16 April 1979).

large and even if there is some risk of loss, the goal of farming has to be a humane and Christian goal: providing work, sharing what is produced from the earth that the Lord gives us and waters for us. Let us be sisters and brothers. Let us be true Christians. Let us not die of hunger because we're unwilling to take risks and expose ourselves to receiving smaller profits this year than in previous years.

I also want to call attention to the fact that there's plenty of room in the press for these communiqués of the large producers and cultivators and for news about them¹⁵. Moreover, they are readily received in audience by the government. In contrast, when our poor folk ask in all justice for lower prices or for more equitable conditions in their rural existence, there is no room in the press for them, and there are no meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture or the Bank for Agricultural Development. This is an indication of the injustice of our situation. And this is not provocation on my part! I am simply commenting, as in a family, about how God is asking us to follow the light of today's word. We need a community of fraternal love in which we don't seek just our own advantage but try rather to do justice. This is especially true of those who, by virtue of being in the government or some ministry, must be concerned about the common good.

In light of today's gospel I would also like to comment on violence, a reality which clashes horribly with the message about the spirit of love which ought to guide our community. I speak to all of you, dear sisters and brothers: not only the people of good will who pay heed to me, but also those who have lost their faith in the power of love and have placed their trust in arms and repression and violence and reaction. That is not the right way!

For example, I was very saddened by the news this week of the attempt made against the life of Doctor Fernando Augusto Méndez¹⁶. Also, the interference with our radio station manifests a kind of violence being exercised by those who don't want to hear the voice of justice¹⁷. If this spiral of violence is not stopped, we'll end up in a dreadful situation. I'm convinced that the Salvadoran people have a great capacity for intelligent dialogue, and I appeal to them to use this great capacity to seek solutions for their problems. Remember that from the first of April until the nineteenth we can count eighty-five murders.

A manifesto of the extreme right is now seeking to incite the forces of repression. I urge the government to do the same as they did at the beginning of this presidential term, when the Jesuits were being threatened. The UGB was in fact forced to desist in their efforts to cause bloodshed. It seems, then, that the government is capable of effectively stopping violence and that it should act in this situation in which the voices of new clandestine organizations are

¹⁵ Between 16 April and 21 April *La Prensa Gráfica*, *El Diario de Hoy*, and *El Mundo* published the following full-page or half-page communiqués: «Pronouncement of the Grain Growers of the Central and Eastern Zones of El Salvador», «Manifesto of the Cattle Ranchers», «Communiqué of COPAL», «Merchants in Solidarity with Cotton Growers», «Letter to the President of the Republic, General Carlos Humberto Romero, from the Eastern Cotton Growers», «Letter of Agricultural Professionals and Technicians of El Salvador», «Convocation of the Governing Board of the Cotton Growers Cooperative Ltd.».

¹⁶ Doctor Fernando Augusto Méndez was a member of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador; he escaped unharmed from the attempt on his life. *La Crónica del Pueblo* (20 April 1979).

¹⁷ «Bulletin from the Office of Communication of the Archdiocese of San Salvador» in *La Crónica del Pueblo* (16 April 1979).

making themselves heard¹⁸. The government should speak as effectively as it did then, but without having recourse to repression; it should simply summon people to live in harmony.

Repressive violence cannot be justified by the pretext of combating communism. We agree that communism is certainly a reality, but it is also a phantom used to mystify many situations; it serves as a pretext for those who wish to confuse the demands for justice with communism. I already told you the other day that not everything labeled as leftist is Marxism or communism. Certainly there is much violence, and the church can never support this tactic of violence and hatred. But there is also much that is just, and the church defends whatever justice there may be in the demands of those who suffer. The pope gave us a very useful guideline when he said, «The most effective way to combat communism is to practice social justice that creates the prerequisites for a life that is more humane and more secure».

Given the current wave of violence, I want to ask for mercy or simply for justice in the area of Cinquera, where ten military operations have taken place. The resulting twelve deaths and forty-nine arrests tell us that that region is suffering greatly even if it is hardly noticed by us.

Likewise, I would invite you to turn your gaze to our slum areas, as I was invited to do this week. In Modelo 1, Modelo 2, and Las Mercedes some 130 families are being threatened with eviction¹⁹. Where can they go? In his letter *Octogesima Adveniens* the pope wrote about the challenge to human wisdom and the need to inspire the imagination of talented politicians and technicians (OA 19). The church cannot offer a technical solution, but she does call attention to this matter. The situation will not be resolved by evicting 130 families. The challenge is to see how their present miserable condition can be improved a little and a worthy solution be found for them. In this regard the church is proud to be doing what she can through Vivienda Mínima, which provides low-cost housing and helps toward a solution.

And so we could continue speaking, dear sisters and brothers, but I will conclude with an appeal for unity and solidarity with our compatriots who are suffering. I am asking the Ministry of Labor to investigate and find out the truth about the Salvadoran workers who have returned from Saudi Arabia²⁰. For my part, I lament especially the situation of our compatriots who are much closer, in the United States. When Bishop Rivera returned from Venezuela he told me, «I flew on flight 503 from Guatemala to El Salvador. Though I've taken this flight many times, this time caused me to reflect deeply. Most of the passengers were young Salvadoran workers and *campesinos* who were being deported from the United States. Even though they were returning to their native land by plane, they appeared disillusioned, uncomprehending, and defrauded. They couldn't obtain a visitor's visa, and so they embarked on an adventure and entered by whatever way they could. Some succeeded in foiling the surveillance, and they remained there working and getting paid. Others managed to legalize their migration status. But these were being deported and returned to their native soil by plane. Almost every afternoon crowds of deported Salvadorans arrive on flight 503». The bishop's comments made me think: something must be wrong with a country whose children are being removed from so many other places. I asked myself: why are our people leaving here? Why are we being

¹⁸ We have been unable to determine whether the reference is to an earlier communiqué of FALANGE or to a new communiqué of either FALANGE or another paramilitary organization of the extreme right.

¹⁹ *La Crónica del Pueblo* (21 April 1979).

²⁰ *Orientación* (22, 29 April, and 6 May 1979).

deported from so many places? These questions torment me and need to be answered. We're all responsible for seeking answers. Maybe when we study the document of Puebla we'll be able to respond.

The church cannot ignore the situation of our sisters and brothers in Saudi Arabia, in the United States, or in any other part of the world where they are being mistreated. They are our sisters and brothers! If they commit injustices or do illegal things, let us call them to conversion and judge them—let us help them resolve their problems. As I've said before, the church's competency does not include technical solutions, but she makes clear what the duties are of those who hold power. Those who hold political or professional posts should use their intellectual abilities to serve the people. We are all sisters and brothers, and we all have to search for a solution for the sake of our nation.

On this Sunday the church has made a valuable contribution through the liturgy of the word. She has shown how Christ infuses a new Spirit into humankind, his own Spirit as the risen One, the Spirit of hope, the Spirit of faith. From this Spirit is born the Christian community, which is a community of faith, hope, and love. Let us try to make this community of faith and love a reality among us. In parish communities, in base communities, and in this community of the archdiocese, let us strive so that this breath of Christ not be neglected among us. We possess the strength of the risen One, and our church will surely flourish if we are truly docile to that breath that Christ bestowed on us, his church, on that first Easter night. Let it be so. (Applause)