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THE CHURCH PROLONGS THE PRIESTLY LIBERATION OF CHRIST

Thirty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time

4 November 1979

Deuteronomy 6:2-6

Hebrews 7:23-28

Mark 12:28-34

Dear sisters and brothers, I want first of all to greet with fraternal affection the four priests here present who are celebrating twenty-five years of priestly ministry: Father José Antonio Vides, pastor of Our Lady of Fatima in La Rábida; Father Andrés Alvarenga, pastor of Concepción in Santa Tecla; Father Joaquín Brizuela, pastor of Ciudad Arce; and Father Óscar Martell, pastor of Apopa. We also lovingly remember another priest from the same class, Father Jesús González of the diocese of San Vicente. I ask you to pray for them and to extend them warm congratulations this morning. (Applause) I also have the pleasure today of appointing Father Ramiro Jiménez, who is concelebrating with us, as pastor of this parish, the Basilica of the Sacred Heart. (Applause)

This priestly presence joins together with you, the people of God, sanctified in baptism so that you participate in the eternal priesthood of Christ. This provides us with a marvelous understanding of the meaning of our Sunday Mass presided over by a priest. It can be even the humblest priest as long as he has the authorization of Christ to convoke the people of God and preside at their celebration. Through the ministry of the priest, together with the priestly people who are active participants in the Sunday Mass, we offer the most beautiful sacrifice that the world can offer to God. As a base for our reflection, then, let us use the second reading, which providentially is about priesthood; it contrasts the transitory nature of the life of a human priest with the infinite, eternal, indestructible priesthood of Christ. The letter that was read today tells us, «Many priests succeeded one another because death prevented them from remaining in office» (Heb 7:23).

In 1954 these men were young priests leaving the seminary, and today they are celebrating twenty-five years of meritorious ministry; they are aging and maturing toward eternity. That is what the word of God tells us, «Many priests succeeded one another because death prevented them from remaining in office». We priests are mortal men; like all mortals, we grow old and die. But as the years pass we are left with a profound satisfaction, which is explained in what follows in the epistle: «Jesus, because he remains forever, has a priesthood that does not pass away» (Heb 7:24). We don't try to compete with Jesus but are his humble servants striving to make him present in the world, and we do so for as long as God wants to use our poor mortal existence as a transitory sign of the one eternal Priest whom we represent. Jesus is the one who can definitively save those who draw near to God through him because he lives forever in order to intercede on our behalf.

So the priest is a messenger of Christ's eternity even as he passes through this life. The author of the letter to the Hebrews goes on to tell us about the eternal nature of Christ's priesthood and about the efficacy of the mystery the priest makes present to people—by pardoning, by giving the body of Christ, by baptizing, by preaching the divine word—not because the priest is eternal and infallible but because he is a messenger of the Eternal, Infallible One.

This is something for us to consider, but along with the mystery of the priest who is a minister, dear sisters and brothers, you must also appreciate the greatness that you have as a priestly people, for it is from you the people and from our own families that men are taken to be anointed priests and then returned to serve the people. Being a minister means being a servant; priesthood is ministerial. Here the only Lord is Christ. We priests are his intermediaries, and the principal part of our service is to bring you closer to Christ.

From the day of baptism, each one of you (and I as well) was incorporated into a priestly people. And every Sunday Mass is nothing less than a demonstration of this priesthood of Christ. We come to Mass not as an act of piety but to participate in a profound mystery, one that many people do not understand. The smallest child who has come to the Mass or the most insignificant person present here is a living member of the priestly people, the people of whom the Holy Bible sings, «You made us kings, Lord, and priests for our God» (Rev 1:6). Each one of you can say it: you are priests for our God. Therefore, the priestly theme imposed by this reading and the others today provides us with the title of today's homily.

Does this theme of priesthood seem unrelated to the present situation of the country, with so many political, military, and economic matters to discuss? If we ourselves are protagonists in this historic moment of our country, is it not madness for us to draw apart from all the troubles besetting our republic in order spend a quiet moment adoring our God? By no means! The one who is actually saving the world is Christ the Priest who is present on earth through his priestly people. As we reflect today, I invite you to join with these priests celebrating their jubilees and with all priests—some of them may by chance be hearing me—so that all of us as a priestly people may take seriously our roles as people of God, as priests, as bishops. We must not become estranged from the history of El Salvador; we must be, within that history, what Christ wants his people to be: salt, light, and leaven (Matt 5:13-14). This is my hope. This is my greatest desire.

What I would like to experience and have others understand is that I preach and I work only to create church, only to strengthen the presence of the archdiocese in the world and in El Salvador. May it truly be the people of God in the midst of the republic of El Salvador. May it be the people of God endowed with the traits described in today's readings, which provide a title for my homily today: «The Church Prolongs the Priestly Liberation of Christ». I hope that I can make this great mystery better understood. It is one that even I do not understand in its the totality, but it helps me to see the great responsibility that is ours as members of the church, for the church prolongs the priestly liberation of Christ!

Today's readings describe for us three ministries that constitute the prolongation of Christ's priestly liberation. The first mission of this people of God, which includes us priests and all of you, is the defense of monotheism. There is only one God. This is the monotheism that the church proclaims and defends. The second mission of the church, as described in today's readings, is the construction of the civilization of love. How badly we need

this leaven of love in our dough, which is putrid with hatred and violence! And third, the church is a minister of true worship of the living God. This, then, is a synthesis of my thought. I ask the Holy Spirit to turn your kind attention into purpose so that all of us—you, our dear priests celebrating their twenty-fifth anniversary, the new pastor, and myself as the episcopal servant of the community—may truly make the church's presence in El Salvador a revelation of the liberating priestly power of Christ. Our first point, then, will be defending the one God and Lord, monotheism; our second, building the civilization of love; and our third, being ministers of the true worship the people render to the one true God.

Defending monotheism

First, defending monotheism. Today's gospel places us in the last week of Christ's life. Throughout Mark's gospel we have been following Christ's journey as he moves toward Jerusalem. Three times along the way he foretold his passion, and now the hour had arrived. He entered the city triumphantly on Palm Sunday, and the following days, from Sunday until his death, were days of great activity. In the portico of the temple and in the surrounding area there were many heated discussions, culminating in the tragic demise of that Master of truth at the hands of countless rumors and lies and purely human legalities.

Today's gospel episode lowers the polemical tone a bit so as to allow a friendly conversation between Christ and a scribe who is skilled in the law. The scribe asked Christ a question that at that time was much debated among the teachers of Israel in their efforts to organize the numerous laws of Moses and the tradition. The question was: what were the principal commandments, the ones that would give order to the bundle of laws that made religious practice so difficult? That's what the scribe asked Jesus: «Teacher, what is the principal commandment?» (Mark 12:28). And Jesus gave the answer you heard.

The beautiful saying that Saint Mark cites here corresponds to what the Jews call the *Shema*, which is the first word of a prayer. The word *shema* means «hear» as in «Hear, O Israel!» The words Christ cites here are found literally in the book of Deuteronomy. According to tradition, Moses commanded the people to learn these words by heart: «Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your being. And the second is this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself» (Mark 12:29-31; Deut 6:4-5).

Christ invites us to open the book of Deuteronomy and to find there this famous profession of faith in the one God, which is also a profession of the people's commitment to the one God in total love. Christ invites us to open the book of Deuteronomy and read how Moses warned the people who had heard the revelation of the eternal and living God about the great danger of being tempted by the Canaanites as they entered the Promised Land. For the Canaanites were a people who adored false Baals, false gods. The people who were about to enter this new land «flowing with milk and honey», as the Bible describes it (Exod 3:8), were in danger of believing that the god of Canaan was perhaps stronger than the God who had made them journey through the harsh, arid desert. This was a great theological temptation, and Moses warned them against it with these words: «Be careful not to adore false gods! There is only one God, and you shall love him with all your heart. Learn by heart the words I speak to you today, and repeat them to your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest. Tie them to your wrist as a sign, and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates» (Deut 6:4-9). Moses

was telling the people this: «Faith in the one God must be the watchword of your person, your family, and your society. You are the people of God, and you must distinguish yourselves by your commitment to this God». This was a monotheistic faith in the midst of a polytheistic world, a world that adored many gods. This was a faith with a patriotic reach: «Your possession of the land and your social and political relations with others are closely connected with this faith in the one God. As long as you are faithful to this God, you will possess this land flowing with milk and honey. Your greatest danger lies in idolatry».

Dear sisters and brothers, I want to apply these words of Moses to our beloved Salvadoran people. This morning I would like all of us to adopt this practice of the people of Israel: reciting the *Shema* twice a day. The Jews pray daily the whole of this text of Moses that I just recited, and they also wear little strips attached to their wrists or to their hats on which there are words from the law of Moses, the law of God. That is why Christ criticized the Pharisees for making their religion consist in lengthening their «phylacteries» (Matt 23:5), which were the strips or the pockets in which they carried the writings of divine revelation. Moses spoke of the phylacteries in a figurative not a literal sense, as a way of telling the people that they should never forget God in all gestures they made with head or hands; they should keep God before their eyes and always remember that there is only one God. A Salvadoran today might say, «But that was in olden times». Certainly, the Baals of Canaan were from another time, but today in our land there are still Baals and idols. With respect to them the church, prolonging the priestly mission of Christ, must proclaim faith in the one and only God, as Moses did. This is the ministry of priests! We must tell those who are worshiping false idols to take heed, for such worship offends God and destroys the country.

In my pastoral letter I point out the three great forms of idolatry that are very dangerous for our country. The first is the worship of private property and wealth¹. As we reflect now on the one true God and think about this idol of wealth and private property, I invite you to consider the wise words that Pope John II addressed to the Latin American pastors at Puebla: «The church is constantly concerned about the delicate question of property»². He recalled the earliest traditions of Christianity, which were later systematized by the wisdom of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas never placed an absolute or idolatrous value on private property. «This voice of the church», the pope stated, «is an echo of the voice of the human conscience, which has not ceased to resonate across the centuries amid the most varied socio-cultural systems and conditions. This voice deserves and needs to be heard in our own age as well, when the growing affluence of a few people is paralleled by the growing misery of the masses. This is a time when the church's teaching becomes more urgent than ever, for the church teaches that a social mortgage weighs heavily on all private property. ... Christ did not remain indifferent in the face of this vast and demanding imperative of social morality, and neither can the church. In the spirit of the church, which is the spirit of Christ, let us work always in this field, relying on broad and solid doctrine»³.

In other words, let us never grow weary of denouncing the idolatry of wealth, which makes human greatness consist in simply *having* and forgets that true greatness consists in *being*. People are of value not for what they have but for what they are. When people idolize

¹ *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 43.

² JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse at the Opening of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla», 28 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 February 1979).

³ *Ibid.*

having, however, they become greedy and oppose social changes. If there is any great danger in our country, it is this kind of idolatry, which is perhaps the worst temptation at this very moment when it is finally possible for the country to begin to be transformed. The right-wing extremists who worship their idols of money and wealth don't want any of their privileges abridged, and so they're probably already allying with the aggrieved military officials who want to mount a counter-coup. (Applause)

In these days the danger of a new insurrection has been denounced, and there has even been specific mention of the names of officers and wealthy backers⁴. We do not know how well founded this report is, but certainly there is a dangerous ideological force at work. As long as the idolaters of earthly things are not converted to the one true God, they present the greatest danger to our own homeland. So we must all take care to be converted to the only God. When we speak in this way, we are not impelled by any kind of social acrimony. We do not adore wealth, thank God, nor do we have any need of it. Since we possess everything in the one and only God who has created the things of earth, we feel infinitely more wealthy and more prosperous than those who think that wealth consists of gold and earthly things. As the pope said in *Populorum Progressio*, «The more the human heart adheres to this idol, the lower the level of moral development is seen to be» (PP 19). The result is covetousness and envy, the desire to have more and to subjugate others under my wealth. This is the worst kind of moral underdevelopment because idolatry destroys our humanity and offends against God.

There is another kind of idolatry these days that the church must also denounce and unmask, and at this moment in our history she is doing so and should continue to do so boldly. It is the idolization of power, especially when the power is called «national security». As my pastoral letter states, «The interests and advantages of the few are made absolute. As a result the noble function of the armed forces is perverted. Instead of serving true national interests, they become the guardians of the interests of the oligarchy, thus deepening their own ideological and economic corruption. Something similar happens with the security forces. Instead of keeping civil order, they basically become organisms for repressing political dissidents. Finally, the military high command itself violates the constitution by obstructing the democratic political procedures that should decide the country's course»⁵. As a consequence we end up with «omnipotent regimes, contempt for individuals and their rights, and a total lack of ethics in the choice of means to achieve ends»⁶. Ironically, national security ends up being insecurity. (Applause)

In saying all this, I invoke the spirit of Medellín, whose document on pastoral ministry to the elites has a section addressed to the military powers; it states the following: «With relation to the armed forces, the church should impress on them that, besides their normal functions, they have a mission to guarantee the political freedoms of citizens and should not set up obstacles to those freedoms. Moreover, the armed forces should educate the young soldiers in their ranks in ways that will allow them to participate freely and responsibly in the future political life of the country» (M 7,20).

⁴ During a press conference at the law faculty of the national university on 2 November 1979, Jorge Schafik Handal, general secretary of the Salvadoran Communist Party, denounced plans for a counter-coup and presented a list of civilians and military officers who were implicated in it. *El Diario de Hoy* (3 November 1979).

⁵ *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 47.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

As you can see, sisters and brothers, the church is not pessimistic, nor does she share the views of those who expect nothing good from the military. The church points to the great sins of the military, but she also calls them to conversion and trusts that the light of hope offered by the young military officers is sincere. We hope that they are motivated by truly noble ideals of service to the people. Let them not seek strength by relying on their own institution and assaulting the people, but let them rely on the people, who will then feel them closer and see them as defenders of their rights and their interests. (Applause)

For me this is a time of great hope. Here, in accordance with our ministry, we are preaching monotheism, worship of the one God. This is the church's mission: snatching the false idols away from all their worshipers. What we said regarding the idolaters of money, we say also regarding those who idolize power and the force of arms. Don't allow your greatness to consist in that. Make it consist rather in the force that comes from serving this people in need. They have wept much and bled too much. Let us seek now better medicines. (Applause)

But I also say in my pastoral letter, «Beware the false Baals!» and now I repeat it in the light of God's word, along with Moses, who called his people to worship the one true God. But let me tell you that there is still another great danger of idolatry among us, and that is the idolatry of the organization⁷. Organizations ordinarily arise when the people exercise their right to organize to defend themselves, and that is something very good! We've said this a thousand times: the church defends the people's right to organize. However, organizations that are born with noble objectives can be prostituted when they are absolutized and lead to false adoration. When people make the organization the supreme value that overrules all other interests, including those of the people, then they also are idolaters. When the organization becomes in practice something absolute, fanaticism takes over so that the organization's interests reign supreme. These, then, are the great dangers.

When an organization no longer seeks the one absolute value, which is God working for the common good of the nation, then its activities become politicized. It is as if the political dimension were the only element or the principal element in the lives of *campesinos*, the workers, the teachers, the students, and all the other members of the organization. It is dangerous to politicize life to such an extent that people begin to believe that everything is politics. Politics is one dimension of life, but it is not the whole of life.

Another absurd aspect of absolutizing an organization is seen when it attempts to subordinate to its own political objectives the specific missions of other organizations, such as trade unions, social groups, even religious organizations. That means manipulating autonomous professions for the sake of a political objective, and it can even involve manipulating the church for political ends. Many people fall into the temptation of wanting to politicize the church, but that cannot be. If the church speaks of politics, she does so as church, but she doesn't allow herself to be manipulated by anybody. (Applause)

Another great danger of this kind of idolatry is that, by subordinating all the people's interests to their political ideals, the organizations lose interest in the original desires of the impoverished *campesinos* and workers, who want to improve their situation. Everything is converted into a political campaign, and that can lead to tragic consequences. It is certainly

⁷ Ibid, 49.

true that there must be a struggle unto death, but we have to make sure that such a death is worthwhile. We should not die for just any reason.

The idolatrous sectarianism of organizations can reach such an intensity that it prevents any kind of dialogue or alliance with other organizations, even those with similar aims. If Salvadorans are now seeking the salvation of the country by different paths, why must I cling only to «my way» and not seek to enter into dialogue and negotiation with other paths? Among all of us we can find a solution!

Take note of what the Vatican Council says when it speaks of Christians who make different political options: «Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it rather frequently happens, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Despite the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed by one side or another may easily be confused with the Gospel message in the minds of many». That is, the organizations are manipulating the Gospel message as if they had a monopoly on the Gospel. The Council says, however, that everyone should understand that «no one is allowed in such situations to appropriate the church's authority for his opinion». In other words, no one can say, «The church is on my side». «They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, above all preserving mutual charity and concern for the common good» (GS 43).

So I think it is quite clear that the church preaches monotheism in opposition to all false idolatry. And we might add, regarding this mission of the church, that there are other, even more shameful idols than the ones just mentioned. There is the idol of pleasure, the idol of sex, the idol of the vices. Think of all the people who are simply oblivious to everything now happening in the country! They don't care about its welfare. They're interested only in carnal pleasure, personal satisfaction, and selfish hedonism. All such things, sisters and brothers, are forms of idolatry as pernicious as they are shameful. They are doing away with marital fidelity, the nobility of human fertility, and the dignity of maternity. Against all these idols the church proclaims the great message that Christ spoke to the scribe on the eve of his death, «The Lord alone is our God» (Mark 12:29). In these words is to be found a synthesis of our monotheistic mission in the world.

Events of the week

In view of these idolatries, allow me to pause here in order to sum up the events of the week. If there is anything good in what has happened this week, it is whatever aims to serve God by working for the common good of the country. I want to say, first of all, that there is much good in our country. I believe in the good faith of many politicians today. I believe that a door to the country's future has been halfway opened and that among all of us we can open it all the way—or among all of us we can also close it again!

I'm not blessing any coup d'état, sisters and brothers, but I believe that we will find ourselves on the sure path of salvation if we follow these recommendations that the church is making today: seeking the common good of the people and adoring as a people the one true God. But if, on the contrary, we continue to crush this hope for salvation with actions as excruciating as those of this past week, then there is hanging over our country only

bloodshed, horror, and despair beyond compare. I don't want us to continue walking along the dangerous trails traced by the history of this last week.

Despite the promises of the governing junta, we have had to lament the gruesome events last Monday and Wednesday that resulted in more than eighty deaths and a hundred injured⁸. With respect to both the twenty-ninth and the thirty-first there are two contradictory versions: one from the security forces and the other from the people's organizations. There is urgent need for a thorough investigation into who initiated these tragic events, and the results of the investigation and the evidence it turns up should be published no matter who began the violence. Most of the impartial eyewitnesses agree in condemning the cruelty and savagery with which the security forces attacked the demonstrators and the people in general. (Applause) This is the only way to explain the very large number of dead and wounded, but it by no means justifies what happened.

Efforts have been made to place the sole blame for all the deaths on the people's organizations, with accusations that the organizations provoked the violence and were seeking to destabilize the government. Very few persons, however, have dared to point a finger at the security forces even though they are probably the ones who have greater responsibility and blame for the many persons killed. (Applause)

I have been asked by the February 28 People's Leagues to read this letter. I'm going to read only a part because it's very long:

We hope the following will contribute to reducing the confusion produced by the mass media's distortion of information. First, our organization emphatically denies the accusation that it provoked the security forces into committing the massacre of 29 October. Second, the repression on that day was coldheartedly planned; many of our companions were captured, thus increasing the number of disappeared persons and political prisoners. Third, we condemn the reprehensible sacking of small businesspeople of the Plaza 14 de Julio on the day of the massacre; it was carried out by groups of thieves with the protection and complicity of the security forces. (Applause) And fourth, we ask the archbishop, the archdiocesan Legal Aid Office, and the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador to intercede for the persons arrested, disappeared, or injured in order to protect their lives and assure their immediate release⁹.

We also have here the courageous statement of the Human Rights Commission, with whose findings and conclusions I want to express my solidarity. They state the following:

The political problems are not going to be resolved by military force or by the coercive apparatus of the state. Second, the repressive events contradict the promises formulated by the Revolutionary Junta of Government, which has made a commitment to respect human rights and ideological pluralism. The actions of the junta demonstrate

⁸ On Monday 29 October 1979 the security forces broke up a demonstration organized by the LP-28 in support of the mothers and families of political prisoners and disappeared persons. A few days later twenty-one victims of the massacre were buried in the church of El Rosario. On Wednesday 31 October 1979 a mock march organized by the BPR was also broken up.

⁹ «Letter of the February 28 People's Leagues to Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador», 3 November 1979. See *Manuscripts of the Schemas of the Homilies of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero*, in the Office for the Cause of the Canonization of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero, Archbishop's Office of San Salvador.

that they are continuing the repressive methods of the previous government. Third, because of these actions in violation of human rights, the military junta and its cabinet are becoming ever more isolated from the people. In almost irreversible fashion they are undermining their own credibility and losing the confidence and wholehearted support of the people; they are producing instead more anguish, terror, and mistrust. We therefore condemn the actions here denounced as violations of the right to life, the right to organize and protest, and the right to freedom of thought. We demand that repressive measures against the people be immediately halted and that human rights be truly respected, as was promised. We hereby issue a call to the civilians and the young military officers who are honest and conscientious and who are still part of the cabinet of the military junta: do everything in your power to ensure effective and immediate respect for the right to life and personal integrity, the right to organize, the right of assembly, and the right to ideological dissent.

On Tuesday there was a confrontation between demonstrators and the United States Marines, and the results of that encounter speak volumes. The demonstration was broken up with teargas; no one was killed, very few people were injured, and then only slightly¹⁰. In contrast, the demonstrations broken up by our own security forces caused many deaths and injuries. (Applause)

It may be the case that the security forces are repressing people brutally, and more brutally than in the previous regime, because they want to prevent this new government from gaining credibility. (Applause) I say this precisely because I believe in the honesty of the young military officers. I believe that they can give the army the true character that the constitution requires. But as long as greater efforts are not made to restore true dignity to the armed forces, they are likely to remain the puppets of those who have always manipulated what is most sacred in our country. (Applause) Some members of the security forces who are responsible for past crimes now fear being exposed and prosecuted by this regime, but they should be prosecuted. (Applause)

I want to tell you about a tragic experience that happened Thursday night. The People's Leagues captured a member of the National Guard who tried to enter El Rosario church with his weapon. As night approached, they told me that the situation was very dangerous because the Guard unit was preparing to rescue the captive dead or alive. They asked if I would intercede. With eagerness I went there in search of a peaceful solution to this grave matter. The public prosecutor and some other priests also arrived, and we realized that there was no real problem. Yes, the Guard was detained because he had tried to enter the church with arms, and the Leagues held him captive, but they had summoned the prosecutor in order to hand the soldier over to him and they were now waiting for him to arrive. Meanwhile, news reached the Guard unit that they were torturing the captive and slowly killing him little by little. I bear witness that they handed the captive over about one o'clock in the morning, by which time the Guard unit had surrounded the church and were threatening to attack if the captive wasn't turned over. They were difficult moments! Along with the other mediators, I urged the Leagues to turn the man over, and they did so. With that the brewing storm was calmed.

¹⁰ *La Prensa Gráfica* (31 October 1979).

What I'm saying, then, is that I have experienced the aggressiveness at firsthand. At the same time I have noticed in the young officers a desire to calm things down and a capacity for dialogue. Other sectors, however, continue to be wildly aggressive. What this tells me, sisters and brothers, and what I'm finding confirmed here, is that a prudent purge is necessary. I say this because later on something similar happened with the police force. They were falsely informed that two police officers had been captured, but it was untrue. They conducted a search, and I personally accompanied them. There were twenty-one corpses there, but there were no police officers among either the living or the dead. Thus again on that Thursday night a second phase of the storm was calmed.

All these things make me realize that if we're living this way, separated by an abyss of mistrust and fear, then evil exists. These security agents must comprehend that they have often acted on orders and that, if there is a purge of the security forces, then the ones who must be judged and punished are the officers who have poisoned the minds of these men. (Applause) This is the great task of the new government because there is a serious danger that things will turn even uglier if the repression continues. The situation would be even worse than before because many officers will try to cover up their old crimes with new crimes. This cannot be tolerated. (Applause). Besides punishing the officers who are guilty, I have also urged the subordinate officers to collaborate in the purge. I believe in the goodness of people, even when their minds have been perverted by poisonous ideas. Therapy is possible, and people can be healed. I ask, therefore, that we not distrust people as long as there is a spark of hope for conversion. Let us do all we can to make that conversion a genuine reality. I believe that all of us need to be more and more converted to the one true God.

I don't understand how it's possible that the governing junta issued an official statement, through the presidential communications office, containing a judgment regarding those events without having heard from both sides. Instead of ordering a thorough investigation, the junta has tried to justify the massacre by arguing that the government response to the demonstrators' aggression was an exercise of the civic right of legitimate defense and a measure aimed at protecting the great many persons who might otherwise have been innocent victims. Those who are inclined to violence should be mindful that there are definite conditions for legitimate self-defense. It requires that the defensive action be proportionate to the action of the unjust aggressor. If someone comes to assault me with his hands and no other weapon, I should not respond with a weapon. (Applause) This is true even when the aggressor has mean motives. In any case, there is no way that the reaction to a demonstration that leaves so many people massacred can be considered proportionate. The weapons used and the lethal results show clearly that this principle of morality was ignored. (Applause) Nor can it be said that they were trying to defend innocent persons because a great many of those killed in that action were in fact innocent. (Applause)

The public prosecutor was also present on that ill-fated Thursday night in the church of El Rosario, and he has promised to carry out a thorough investigation. This is what must be done. I congratulate the prosecutor, and I ask him to make sure that his promise doesn't end up in the same wastebasket as so many of the promises of earlier regimes. (Applause) If there is a break with the past, then this will be one of the best indications: promises are kept.

With regard to the similarly tragic outcome of the massacre at the mock march, the Minister of Defense has reported that the head of public relations of the Treasury Police

was dismissed for having lied when he claimed that that no security forces took part in events on Wednesday. This is a magnificent gesture, but it doesn't leave me fully satisfied because it doesn't resolve the question as to why he had to lie. (Applause) If the Treasury Police were simply victims of a provocation, what need was there to hide this fact?

At least twice this week the United States government has declared its support for the junta and has offered economic and military assistance¹¹. Instead of doing this, it seems that the best way for the United States to help El Salvador at this time is by conditioning its assistance. The Salvadoran government should be required to purge the security forces, find a satisfactory resolution to the problem of the disappeared persons, and punish those responsible. (Applause) If these conditions are not met, then the military aid the United States gives us will only end up reinforcing the people's oppressors. (Applause) Even if only teargas and bulletproof vests are provided, these will contribute to more determined repression of the people.

A consequence of all this was the burial of twenty-one bodies in the church of El Rosario. There were many protests and also many sympathetic voices. Some people wanted to blame the archbishop for allowing this to happen. I tell you that what happened was not a question of permission. What was done was done, and it happened without official consent. In serious cases the church agrees that corpses be treated in accord with the common good. The Leagues claimed that they didn't want the burials to take place publicly because they foresaw more bloodshed. If that was the case—and that too would require exhaustive investigation—then I think it was wise to bury them in the church. (Applause) In normal times two permissions must be requested for this: one of the Holy See, since only the pope can allow burial in a church, and the other of the civil authority, which is the Assembly when it is in session. So I am not the only one involved in this; the civil authority is also. What I can say is that when the time comes to legalize the burials, it will be done. Meanwhile, all I can do now is inform the Holy See of what has happened and provide the necessary explanation. I have no fear of doing this. (Applause)

For their part, the people's political movements¹² have done some dreadful things this week. They killed at least eight members of the security forces, they kidnapped Jaime Hill Argüello¹³, and they've done a series of other things that would be impossible to enumerate. What a spasm of violence we're living through! Perhaps many people are taking advantage of this situation for their own personal interests. At the same time, they haven't freed the four other kidnapped victims¹⁴. I am in solidarity with the anguish of their families, and I renew my call for an end to the violence. I want to tell the violent activists of the left that by their actions they are provoking a rightist counter-coup. Who knows whether conspirators aren't trying to manipulate the situation, now using different names? There can be no playing with the powder keg that our country has become!

The governing junta has given the public prosecutor and the Supreme Court the job of investigating the situation of the disappeared persons, and they in turn have stated that they will attempt to ascertain the whereabouts of the disappeared. The junta has also formed

¹¹ *La Prensa Gráfica* (31 October 1979).

¹² Given the context, the reference is to the political-military organizations, better known as guerrilla organizations: FPL, ERP, FARN, and PRTC.

¹³ A businessman kidnapped on 31 October 1979. *La Prensa Gráfica* (1 November 1979).

¹⁴ Dennis McDonall, Fausto Buchelli, Jaime Batlle, and Luis Escalante Arce.

an ad hoc commission for the same purpose. This also gives us hope. This commission has the total support of the people and will be required to give a report that conforms strictly to the reality. Let us hope that it also has the support of the military, the members of the junta, and all the other persons responsible for this new situation in the country. May the military officials work effectively and energetically. May the junta, which has had the opportunity to meet with the security forces, help this commission to gain the support of the country's vital grassroots forces. And may the people finally receive a satisfactory response to their already overlong anguish because of the absence of their loved ones.

The present government has been treating the problem of the disappeared as a legacy of the past, but already in this present regime there are disappeared persons whose whereabouts are unknown. Among them is one for whom I make a personal appeal on behalf of the church: the sacristan of the parish in Soyapango was taken, along with the pastor, to the Treasury Police station, and nothing more is known of him. (Applause)

Pope John Paul II has referred to similar events in other countries; he has often presented the drama of the disappeared or «lost» persons in Argentina and Chile. Speaking this week in Saint Peter's Square, the pope said, «Pray that God will give strength to those who have no hope of embracing their loved ones again. Let us fully share their pain and not lose confidence that these agonizing problems can be effectively resolved not only for the sake of the families but also for the internal peace and welfare of these communities so dear to us»¹⁵. The pope also stated that the fundamental, inalienable rights of human beings are an indispensable condition for peace in every community, in every country, and in the world as a whole¹⁶.

Given the government's desire to resolve this problem, the church offers once again the services of the Legal Aid Office, which has a list of documented cases that can be of assistance to the investigating commission. I repeat once more that the archdiocese will stand in continued solidarity with these families until they obtain the freedom of their loved ones. (Applause) Or in the cases of those who have been killed, until they receive exhaustive information about the crime, along with the compensation due and the punishment of those responsible. (Applause)

Another act of vandalism was the bombing at *El Diario de Hoy* and at *La Prensa Gráfica*¹⁷. Although I have often denounced here the complicit silences and the partiality of the information given by these media, I in no way approve of using violence to combat the media's violation of the right to information and expression. Ideas are combated with ideas, not with bombs or other weapons. (Applause)

We also read about the government's emergency program, which is very encouraging. It involves reactivation of the economy with a clear orientation in favor of the people, stressing creation of jobs and selective control of inflation. On the level of politics the government proposes to reaffirm human rights, break with political vices of the past, eradicate corruption, and increase the people's participation in government decisions¹⁸. I want these

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Sunday Allocution of 28 October 1979» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 November 1979).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* (29 October 1979).

¹⁸ *El Diario de Hoy* (2 November 1979).

words to become a new ray of hope, capable of summoning into reality these projects which the people so badly need.

While denouncing the idolatry of violence and the idolatry of organization and the other forms of idolatry, I must make reference also to the matter of the occupation of the ministries. The occupiers have already freed most of the employees who were being held as hostages; some of them were persons unconnected to the ministries. I was informed of this by a group of coffee growers who had gone to the Ministry of the Economy to negotiate on behalf of small and medium-sized growers. The junta has agreed to dialogue with the People's Revolutionary Bloc if they release the remaining hostages.

The junta's recognition of the members of a popular organization as interlocutors seems to me a positive gesture; it never would have happened with the former regime. It also seems to me a very positive development that the junta has shown interest in studying the Bloc's proposals and a willingness to dialogue. At the same time, I understand the organization's distrust; they don't want to free the hostages because they fear the same kind of brutal repression we saw in the people's demonstrations last week. (Applause) I am in solidarity with the families of the hostages; I understand their anguish. Some of them have asked me to mediate, but the mediation, I repeat, must be sought by both sides, and so far the People's Revolutionary Bloc has not wanted to allow the archbishop's mediation. In order to overcome this impasse in negotiations and to ease the pain of the many people who feel oppressed by a form of fascism and who suffer because of the absence of loved ones, I earnestly urge the People's Revolutionary Bloc and the military Junta to look for ways to overcome these difficulties and enter into dialogue, beginning with negotiations for the freedom of the hostages. The other organizations should do the same. I know for a fact that the junta has offered to dialogue with other organizations because I've offered to mediate, but they have not accepted.

We have a saying: «People come to an understanding by talking together». Let us learn how to speak the language of politics and not just the language of violence. Let us be agile in reformulating our analyses and our ideas when they don't correspond to reality. History is not constituted by rigid schemas. History is life, and those who seek to mold our living history through politics cannot take rigid stances; they must be open to the agility of history and understand the need for new stances. What the organized groups need to do is provide true political leadership and be educators of the people. They must truly be social forces that know how to apply pressure and give guidance, but they must do so not in a closed but in an open way. The good of the country is more important than the good of the organization, and this is true now more than ever. (Applause)

Forgive me for saying this, dear sisters and brothers, but I believe that what I'm calling for will provide a basis for the solutions we need. No one has the key, and that's why we're all still suffering, but among all of us we can find the key. I therefore want to congratulate the Medical College of El Salvador for the statement in which they issue this call: «We consider the participation of other professional sectors to be necessary so that the whole nation can make further progress and so that its confidence in the process which is underway can be restored. The participation of professional bodies will allow for the purging of immoral and dishonest elements that for long years have debased all our institutions»¹⁹. We can say, then,

¹⁹ «The Medical College of El Salvador Addresses the National Conscience», *El Diario de Hoy* (3 November 1979).

that we are all called to add our grain of sand during this time of nation-building. Rather than destroying, let us build. The church will offer what she can. I will be very brief in concluding my homily.

Building the civilization of love

The church's second mission is building the civilization of love. When Christ quoted the Old Testament in his dialogue with the scribe, he cited the principal commandment: «You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength» (Mark 12:30). Christ was declaring that the foundation of that great nation called the people of God was their total, wholehearted commitment to the one true God. The logic of that dialogue is this: if there is only one God, then I must give him all my being, all my heart, all my life. The covenant with God is not a juridical matter but a loving surrender of all my being. When responding to the lawmaker of his time, Christ improved that Old Testament law by adding, «The second law is this: you shall love your neighbor as yourself» (Mark 12:31). The originality of Christ is in the way he unites love of neighbor with love of God in a single precept with a single motivation. This is what is most original in the way we Christians love God.

That is why Puebla, in proposing the preferential option for the poor for Latin America, states the following: «This does not imply any division; it is not a call to distinguish between classes, between rich and poor. Rather, it is an invitation for us all to take up the cause of the poor as our own cause, or even as the cause of Christ who says, "Whatever you do for them, you do for me"»²⁰. Christ fully identifies with human beings and therefore can say, «The first commandment is to love God, and the second is similar: to love your neighbor for the love of God».

If I had time, we could analyze here the message of Puebla calling on us to build the civilization of love²¹. I simply want to quote to you one phrase. Many people think that the call to love is ineffective, inadequate, and feeble. In fact, some reporters who interview me often tell me, «You preach love, but do you believe that love can resolve the problems? Don't you think that violence will accomplish more since throughout history it is only violence that has brought about change?» I tell the reporters, «If this has been in fact the case, it only proves that human beings have not still not used the power that most characterizes them. Humans are not just animals whose main characteristic is brute force. Human beings are characterized by reason and by love». (Applause)

Puebla speaks to those who think that preaching love is a weakness, telling them not to offend against Christ for it is Christ who commanded us to believe in love. It was by love that he saved the world. The truth is that we still have not experienced the force of love. All around us we see distrust, violence, fear, vengeance! Banish them! Puebla states, «There is no greater satisfaction than that of knowing how to forgive and how to be reconciled»²². I believe that these words are the order of the day for our republic. Let us be reconciled and not polarized! Let us live with the integrity of love! Let us observe what Christ said about love: it is not only for the people we like, the people who are kind to us. Love also your enemies; know

²⁰ *Message to the Peoples of Latin America*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²² *Ibid.*, 8.

how to forgive them; join hands with them so that together we can build the good society that benefits all of us.

Minister of the true worship of God

Finally, sisters and brothers, I conclude with a thought about priesthood. When I say that the church is the minister of the true worship of God, I'm referring to the marvelous comment the scribe made to Jesus Christ: «Well said, teacher. You are right in saying that the Lord is one alone and there is no other than he and that to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your being and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices». When Jesus saw that the scribe had responded sensibly, he told him, «You are not far from the kingdom of God». (Mark 12:32-34).

Being close to the kingdom of God means understanding that our religion cannot consist just in worship and prayer while our hearts are filled with hatred. True worship is spiritual worship, the worship of those who love, those who give themselves over in service to others, those who come to Mass after working hard all week in the home or the office, after living not for themselves but for others. Spiritual worship comes before structured worship. Even though the Mass is the presence of Christ who died for us, it has no meaning for us unless we attend it with the eagerness of the sacrificial Christ. In the second reading Saint Paul speaks to us about living in harmony with Christ, and this has been our primary theme: Christ is the high Priest who offers himself once and for all, thus sanctifying all humanity (Heb 7:27). How fruitful is love and how fruitful is worship given to God when it arises from the depths of love!

Life of the church

That is precisely what our church desires to be. Therefore, I invite you as a priestly people of God, dear sisters and brothers, to render this worship in our Sunday Mass. Whenever we worship God, let us be energized by love. Ours is a church that witnesses such love-filled events as the following.

Tomorrow is the centenary of the founding of the Franciscan Sisters of the Virgin, a congregation that had its origins in Murcia, Spain, a century ago. Mother Francisca Paula Gil Cano was their foundress. Here in El Salvador they began their work in Usulután in 1932. They ran the Castillo home for the elderly in Santa Ana, and today they have the clinic in Concepción parish and a school in Metapán. We send them, then, our warm greetings of love and congratulations. (Applause)

The church bears witness to love. In the parish of Colón there were about twenty marriages and many confirmations. I want to congratulate Father Nicolás Menjívar, the Sacred Heart Sisters, and the catechists for having sanctified so many homes this past week.

Mother Catherina DiMaggio School sponsored an activity to help YSAX. Even though the students are poor, they gave us 500 *colones*. (Applause) I want to congratulate the director, Mother Socorro, the teachers, and above all the students. They are proof of the dictum, «It's not those who "have" but those who have the will, who give». Their example is a call to all of us to keep helping to support the church's cultural station.

In El Paraíso the Bethlehemite Sisters celebrated a lovely consecration of the children, which I couldn't attend because of commitments. I thank them for the gift they sent me.

Yesterday also in La Palma I was happy to see the promotional work that Father Vito Guarato is doing there with the sewing academy and the spirituality and development center that is being built beside the convent.

I also want to express my solidarity with the María Auxiliadora group of the Christian Family Movement in their campaign to help those affected by the explosion of the fireworks factory in Ciudad Delgado. This moves me to call on the Christian charity and love of all of you to help those who have been left impoverished as a result. The fires and burglaries and other such things invite us to respond with the love of God.

The Catechumenate communities are gathering today in Planes de Renderos. May the Lord bless their efforts to sanctify themselves through the Bible!

I wish to thank Mr. Duarte for his laudatory comments on his television program, and I also thank the Union of Construction Workers and the People's Forum for their solidarity²³.

Finally, sisters and brothers, I inform you that, assuming no abrupt change in circumstances, I will make the trip I mentioned to you, to attend the ecumenical gathering of the National Council of Christian Churches in the United States. I will take part in the meeting next Thursday, and I want my participation to be more than just a personal effort. In the discourse I've prepared, I state that I'm not traveling alone but am united with my beloved priests, religious, and faithful—with the whole community of the archdiocese. We join together in thanking the Christian communities of the United States, both Catholic and Protestant, for their many expressions of solidarity and for the esteem they have shown us by inviting me²⁴. (Applause)

Before approaching the altar to celebrate with the eternal Priest and with the other priests who are going to concelebrate with me, I ask for a minute more of your patience so that we can read the document appointing Father Ramiro pastor and hear two brief messages: one from the new pastor and the other from one of the priests being feted. (Applause)

²³ The statement of the Union of Construction Workers (SUTC), dated 1 November 1979, states, «The SUTC gives its full support to Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez since it considers him a prelate of the church who expresses the voice of the people. He has struggled courageously for the defense of human rights, for the reestablishment of social justice, and for the attainment of peace and unity for all sectors of the people». *La Prensa Gráfica* (7 November 1979).

²⁴ *Orientación* (11 November 1979).