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THE EASTER CHURCH

**Second Sunday of Easter
Parish of the Resurrection
Colonia Miramonte
17 April 1977**

*Acts 5:12-16
Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19
John 20:19-31*

My dear brother priests and beloved faithful.

On this the patronal feast day of Resurrection Parish and in response to the very kind invitation of Father Navarro, I have the pleasure of making the pulpit of this parish the seat of the archbishop, the seat of the diocese. At this moment, then, we feel that this church is the cathedral of the archdiocese. In concluding Easter Week at this particular parish, I want to present to the diocese my first pastoral letter, which speaks precisely about the Easter church.¹ I am not going to tire you by reading the letter to you, but rather invite each one of you to study it personally. In fact, I recommend that all those involved in our pastoral ministry use this Easter season to deepen their faith in the paschal mystery which has inspired this humble document. The Easter season extends from Easter Sunday to Pentecost, fifty days which are the greatest feast of the liturgy because in them we celebrate the center of the church's life: Christ's death and resurrection.

As a successor of the apostles, I speak to you in this letter in the same way that the Apostle John just spoke to us, «I, your brother» (Rev 1:9). Thus I speak to you as a brother, as a friend, for this is how I want my ministry to be viewed. That is how I have spoken to you in my letter, and I rejoice that God has prepared for me this unexpected portico as a way of entering into my new hierarchical ministry. I pay tribute to Bishop Chávez y González for the rich inheritance he has left us. During thirty-eight years of our agitated history, his worthy and untiring hands knew how to steer the ship of the church with great skill.

The Easter hour

During this time of change I have been entrusted with this pastoral ministry that has a rich history. In 1842 El Salvador was established as a suffragan diocese of Guatemala. The whole country was one diocese until 1913, when it was elevated to the category of archdiocese and became an ecclesiastical province independent of Guatemala. The

¹ *Iglesia de la Pascua (The Easter Church)*, Archbishop Romero's first pastoral letter as archbishop of San Salvador (10 April 1977). The full text was published in *Orientación* (17 April 1977).

dioceses of San Miguel and Santa Ana were then born, and San Salvador became the metropolitan diocese. Thus began a series of archbishops: Bishop Pérez y Aguilar, Bishop Beloso y Sanchez, and Bishop Chávez y González. Now another time of change has arrived, and if I wanted to give it a name, I would call it «the Easter hour». Yes, we are passing through this wonderful Easter time in our land, which coincides with the Easter season of our liturgical year. In this parish that bears the paschal name of the resurrection, I want to express my joy and give thanks to the Lord because only the Spirit of the risen Christ, who lives and builds the church through the ages, can explain the rich inheritance that my venerable predecessor has left us. Only the divine impulse of the Spirit of Easter can explain this unexpected beginning.

My reflection brings us back to the ancient Passover that flowed toward Christ, whom we confess to be our Passover. All the liberating force of the Old Testament is seen in the wonderful actions that God performed to express his undying desire to free the nations and work his salvation in the history of all peoples. And all of this becomes a reality in Christ the Lord, not only for Israel but for all those who believe in him. Therefore we are able to say: Christ saves the Republic of El Salvador in the history we are now living, and all those marvelous deeds of the Old Testament become present in this Passover of El Salvador, which is our Passover.

The thoughts expressed in my pastoral letter fit well with the readings that we have just heard. In olden times this Sunday was called *in albis*, «White Sunday», because those new Christians who had been baptized during the Easter Vigil would wear their white garments during the whole of Easter week to keep in mind their baptismal commitment. On this Sunday they would renew their commitment and put aside their white garments; they would clothe themselves again in their ordinary garments. They knew, however, that even though they lived in the midst of worldly people, they carried within themselves a faith and a hope that made them the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Christianity was always this way. Therefore, at this Easter hour of our country and our archdiocese I am very happy, dear sisters and brothers, to see that so many people have recovered an authentic understanding of the meaning of baptism, and I hope that you will embrace my humble letter and resolve to live together as a Christian community.

Christ continues to save the world through his church

In the first reading today you heard how the first Christians presented themselves to the world as a community that bore witness to their faith. Their love for one another was so great and they lived such authentic Christian lives in the midst of a pagan environment that they were admired by everyone. Yes, they raised their light on high for all to see, and many joined their number and came to believe in the Lord. They believed in the Lord because the Christian community is not simply a human society. The parish and the diocese are communities that bear within themselves the same breath that Christ exhaled on the night of the resurrection. As he breathed on that newborn community, he told them, «Receive the Holy Spirit» (John 20:22).

That action of Jesus, sisters and brothers, seems to me very similar to the action that occurred in Paradise when the Creator breathed life into the first man and made him intelligent and capable of love, a marvel of creation (Gen 2:7). The same can be said

about the wonderful action of redemption that repaired the destruction that sin caused in creation and raised that creation up to a divine level. In this way human friendship was understood as being related to God in a divine family and human groups were given a sense of community to carry on the divine history of Christ in the world. Christ continues to save the world through his church. The parish is his church, and the parish united with the bishop is the diocese, and the bishop united with the pope is the great international Catholic community. From this perspective, then, we experience at this time that breath of Christ.

I want to congratulate you all, beloved priests of the vicariate, dear pastor of this Parish of the Resurrection, beloved collaborators, members of the parish commission, all the vibrant forces that work here, and all you friends who have come together at Mass for this meeting of the parish with your bishop. I congratulate you and thank you for building up this church, not so much the material church, but above all this community which continues to spread through the world this breath of Jesus, this breath which makes the Divine Spirit present with his redeeming power. This is Easter, the Easter that the church continues to experience as a community transformed by the breath that Christ exhaled over us in his profound sigh of creating the church. He transmitted to the church all his paschal power, that is, all the power of that passage from death to life, with all that those two words imply.

For death is sin, mediocrity, injustice, turmoil, abuse of human rights, disorder in all human realities—all of this must be buried in the tomb of the Lord and then raised to new life; that is, it must pass from death to life. Life means justice. Life means respect for the human person. Life means holiness; it means every effort to be a little better each day because every man and every woman, every young person and every child, begins to feel that his or her life is a vocation that God has given them to become present in the world. They become present not only in the wonders of creation as images of God, but also in the wonders of redemption which exalt nature, society, and friendship. This is Easter, and a parish that bears the paschal name of the resurrection must live intensely this communal sense of passing from death to life, from imperfection to perfection and an ever more sublime holiness.

For only in this way, dear sisters and brothers, can we take advantage of this Easter gift that Christ bestows on us. Today's readings tell us that people kept joining this community because they saw it as attractive for its love. This love is the power of the church, dear sisters and brothers. It is not violence or hatred or resentment or calumny. At this time the church has become the victim of crude calumnies. These calumnies are raised against her even by those who use the name of the church. How absurd to have the church destroying herself! The church loves, and the church redeems by doing violence to herself, to the point of becoming like Christ, perhaps, sacrificed on the cross but saving the world with the power of love, which means giving itself over as a missionary force that attracts the world.

Let us hope that this parish community where we are right now continues to be a bright torch that attracts, that brings people together, and that unifies all the marvelous forces of the parish and the neighborhood. For this is our goal, dear sisters and brothers. We should not be satisfied with a simply human society or with friendship that is simply sentimental. Let us raise high this love that Christ has inspired in us. For the love of God

let us love our sisters and brothers, even those who are more difficult to love, those whom we least understand. Let us forgive and understand one another, for this is the power that creates the community of the risen Christ.

The eschatological sense of the church's mission

Finally, I want to speak with you about the eschatological meaning of all this, that is, about those realities that go beyond history, about how we must work in the present time for a better world. And we must do this as the Israelites did, never forgetting that the Passovers of history are imperfect, for even among the alleluias of this world there are many sorrows and many thorns, and the earthly celebration of Easter is always centered on the cross. Nevertheless, through these imperfections, these thorns, these sorrows, these problems, new horizons are opened up. The Israelites thought of the Passover as happiness with God in a perfect banquet, and Christ himself said, «I shall not eat this Passover again until we eat it together in the kingdom of God» (Mark 14:25). Let us walk with Jesus so that the Easter feast that is celebrated each year in this parish might be an invitation to work in a way that makes the world more human and more Christian. But let us also realize that there is no paradise here on earth. Let us not be seduced by those redeemers who offer a worldly paradise—there is no such reality. Paradise exists in the beyond and arises from a firm hope rooted in our hearts. So let us work in this present moment, knowing that the reward of Easter will be given in the measure that we have brought greater happiness to the earth, to the family, and to our worldly reality.

The Virgin herself invites us to live in this holy balance, and in my document I conclude with the following invocation of Mary: Our Divine Savior will not cheat us of our hope. Let us appeal to the Queen of Peace, the heavenly patroness of our people, to intercede with him for us. May the Mother of the risen One defend our church, the sacrament of Easter. Like Mary, may the church live out this happy balance of the Easter of Jesus, which ought to characterize the true salvation of men and women in Christ. May the church feel herself already glorified in heaven as the image and first flowering of the future life, and at the same time may she be here on earth the light for God's pilgrim people «as a sign of sure hope and solace until the Day of the Lord comes».

Therefore, dear sisters and brothers, I place in the hands of the Parish of the Resurrection my pastoral letter for the whole diocese. I beg you who receive this offering to assimilate it, not because it is mine but because it is the Passover of Jesus that has inspired its pages and ought to inspire our sense of parish, our sense of conversion, and our sense of community. In this way our archdiocese can truly become that living church that we dream about more and more.