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JUSTIFICATION AND FAITH

Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

11 June 1978

Hosea 6:3b-6

Romans 4:18-25

Matthew 9:9-13

Dear sisters and brothers, today we arrive at the Tenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. Let us not forget what this Ordinary Time seeks to inculcate in the Christian people. While many people find Sunday Mass boring because it seems always the same, Christians who are truly aware know that it is not the same. It's like when you're traveling along the highway: the stone markers that measure kilometers appear all the same, but if you pay attention, each marker indicates a specific distance and has a different number. So, too, what is spelled out as the year goes by is the mystery of our salvation. As Christians live out their faith each Sunday, it's as if they are reaching a new kilometer, and they're filled with a new hope that helps them continue on their journey toward the destiny of all human life: salvation.

And so I hope our Sunday Masses truly fulfill the objectives defined by the Council with a view to renewing the people of God. The Council has indicated that the first objective of each Sunday assembly should be to experience a sense of community in our church (SC 106). We cannot be saved by ourselves. God wants to save us as a people, a people that adore the Lord. It is good to come together on Sunday and demonstrate that we are the people of God. Second, we come to hear his word and participate in the Eucharist. We do not come out of curiosity; we come to make an act of faith—a faith that is attentive to the word not because it's preached by so-and-so but because it's the word of God, spoken by this instrument who is the preacher. We come to participate in the Eucharist, and this is primary. The word of God prepares us to worship Christ in the host and hopefully to receive the host as nourishment for our pilgrimage. Third, we come together to remember the passion, resurrection, and glorification of our Divine Lord Jesus Christ. And fourth and principally, we come to give thanks to God who has let us be «reborn to new hope through the resurrection» (1 Pet 1:3). We feel that this exuberant, youthful, eternal life of Christ becomes *our life*, and we leave Sunday Mass with the joy of those who have been rejuvenated with new hope in the risen Christ.

This Sunday's readings nourish all these ideas. The title I'm going to give our homily, our reflections for today, is «Justification and Faith». I'm going to present three ideas to organize my thoughts: first, the justification that God offers humanity; second, the disposition we ought to have in order to receive God's justification; and third, the mission of the church and the prophets, which is to prepare people to receive God's justification.

After developing my thoughts, I'm going to make a concrete application because any reflection on God's word that does not relate to what people are actually experiencing is vaporous; it doesn't become incarnate in reality. After finishing this reflection, then, I'm going

to present to you the panorama of the week so that you can view for yourselves what is happening in our country and the world. In this way you'll know who are the people who are getting ready to receive the justification God offers and who are the ones who are rejecting it and turning their backs on God's gift. Thus, our Eucharist is offered by sincere Christians who are converted by God's word and who tell him, «Lord, if until now I have turned my back on what you offered me, I ask forgiveness. I want to change». Change is not sinful when the change is from imperfection to perfection. This is work for all our lives, evolving according to God's thoughts and not according to our passions.

The justification God offers humanity

We begin, then, by saying what kind of justification God offers us. Let us take as the central figure of our reflection, as the Gospels do, Jesus Christ. Let us not forget that the Gospel is always the central focal point of our reflections. Christ is the light that illuminates humankind, and our sight should be fixed directly on him. In today's gospel we see him calling a sinner and then eating and mixing with sinners. And we see how he is criticized: «Look, your teacher is eating with sinners» (Matt 9:11). We see how the Lord defends himself, turning the accusation into a denunciation of false puritanism and hypocrisy.

Christ calls a sinner named Matthew, who was a tax collector and also author of the First Gospel. Those who study history know how repugnant that occupation was in the time of Jesus Christ. The Roman Empire collected taxes from their subject peoples, and they let local people bid for the job of collecting: «Who wants to collect taxes?» A man would come forth and win the job of collecting, and then he'd be in business. He could do what he wanted as long as he turned over to the Roman Empire the amount stipulated. He was free to extort, to rob, to deceive; the fraud was tremendous. The tax collectors were repugnant types, compared in the Gospels with publicans and sinners, harlots and thieves, all sorts of miscreants.

To one of these Christ calls, «Come, follow me» (Matt 9:9). And Matthew leaves his customs post; profit and extortion no longer matter to him. He follows Jesus and in gratitude prepares a meal for him, a little supper, naturally with his friends; the folks around him were lowlife—thieves, publicans, other collectors. Who else could the poor man invite? Christ doesn't refuse even though he was aware of the puritanical attitude of the Pharisees, who condemned any socializing with Jews who failed to keep the law and so were called sinners. The Pharisees did not mix with these people; they wouldn't even shake the hand of a tax collector or a publican. Even though in their hearts they did worse things, they took care to preserve appearances. Christ is not afraid of their criticism or people's attitudes. When he goes and eats with the outcasts, this is seen by the Pharisees as something awful. They say to Jesus' disciples, «Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?» Jesus overhears their question and defends his stance: «Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. I have not come to seek the righteous—they're already safe. I have come to seek sinners. I am the Savior of the world. And remember that this is the will of God: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice". (Matt 9:11-13) You receive your reward by appearing righteous in temple worship. You boast of your legal purity. You don't mix with sinners. But you are tombs, nicely whitewashed on the outside, but what are you like inside? Corruption! Hypocrites! I desire mercy. What is your mercy like? What is your love like? How intimately do you relate to God? How honest are you really? Hypocrites!» (Matt 23:27).

In this way Jesus turns the accusation of false puritanism into a strong denunciation of the hypocrisy of the society in which he lives. The Divine Teacher simply reveals to the world what God is thinking. What Christ says to Matthew and his companions—Matthew being already redeemed by Christ's call—is a direct quote from one of the ancient prophets. Those words, «I desire mercy, not sacrifice», are found in the prophet Hosea, in the passage that was read today (Hos 6:6).

That's why in order to understand this God whom Christ reflects we must go back to the Old Testament, to the whole Bible. God's attitude is revealed there: «I desire mercy, not sacrifice». We have to go back to the times of Hosea, the prophet who experienced the downfall of Israel, the part of Palestine that had separated from Judah. The northern kingdom had a great king when Hosea began to preach: Jeroboam II. But during this glorious time of the northern kingdom, as always when there is prosperity among the people, there was much crime and social injustice, great abuse of authority. This is what Hosea denounces. Read the book of Hosea, and you'll see that our homilies here in the cathedral are nothing in comparison with this prophet's eloquence as he confronts the kings and the high and the mighty, throwing in their faces their abuses and injustices.

After Jeroboam fell, there came a series of cowardly kings who tried to submit themselves to other nations or make alliances with them. Hosea denounced these cowardly kings who had forgotten the covenant with God and were instead seeking support from human beings. He criticizes the politics of the kingdom. A prophet can preach against the politics of his time when the politics is contrary to the law of the Lord. This is what Hosea defends through his prophetic mission. He denounces the errors, the idolatry, and the false confidence of the politicians of his time. This, then, is the God that Hosea proclaims in a situation that was as difficult as is our own. Israel had fallen into the idolatry of worshiping Baal as the god of fertility. They thought that the harvests, the rain, and the sun depended on the god Baal. They tried to combine that idolatry of a false god with worship of the God of the Bible. Hosea was there to defend the purity of the Bible, God's revelation, against this idolatry that was getting mixed in with the true religion.

The denunciation of idolatry has always been the mission of the prophets and the church. We no longer have the god Baal, but there are other tremendous idols of our time: the god of money, the god of power, the god of luxury, the god of lust. How many gods are enthroned in our midst? So the voice of Hosea is relevant also in our own time as a warning to Christians not to mix idolatries with adoration of the true God. «You cannot serve two masters: the true God and money». (Matt 6:24) You can serve one alone. As Matthew was converted from his idolatry of money and followed the one Lord, Jesus Christ, so too we must desire conversion in order to purify the true religion.

This is the God Hosea proclaims. Notice how well Hosea knows his social setting. He takes the very language the idolaters of Baal used when they sang hymns to the dawn, to the rain, to the sun, and he tries to reorient this idolatrous language toward the true God. He speaks to the people of a God who falls like early rain to make fertile the earth, a God who moistens the earth and makes it fruitful (Hos 6:3). This is the true God; it's not Baal. He speaks to the people of a God who is faithful like the dawn, like the sun that rises dependably every morning; he is a God clear and brilliant like the sun that brightens all their days. With the same language that the idolaters used to offend God, the prophet proclaims the true God. Using their own language, he speaks to them about the falsity of their cults.

The second reading today presents us with the God of the New Testament, where we learn about him through Christ himself. I highly recommend, sisters and brothers, that you meditate deeply upon this second reading, and not only on the few verses that were read today but the entire chapter. Here Saint Paul continues with the thoughts I mentioned last Sunday. He says that no human beings are justified by their own efforts, neither the Gentiles by the light of natural reason nor the Jews by the law revealed to them by God. The law alone does not justify, nor does human reason alone justify. A person may be humanly very good, and thank God, there are people who do not have faith but are very good. They are good because the light of reason shows them what they should do and what they shouldn't do. But even if they are humanly very perfect and very good, without faith they are missing what is most important. Saint Paul says that true justice, or justification, is the personal activity by which God takes the gracious initiative of calling people to share intimately with him. Only those who please God are just, because they are participating in God's intimate life. Only those whose sins God has forgiven are just and without sin (Rom 3:21-24).

This isn't just the appearance of justification; here Luther was mistaken. Many of our separated sisters and brothers follow his doctrine, but not all of them, thank God. Luther understood justification to be God covering up our evil, but we continue to be evil. No, what Saint Paul is telling us now is that God truly «justifies»; that is, he doesn't just appear to, but he really does take away our sin; he transforms all our past by cleansing it of the stains we have amassed. And so we have the example of Matthew's encounter with Christ. He is no longer a sinner; Christ has called him, and he has responded. God has given him justification; he is now a saint. Also when Magdalene, the famous prostitute, arrives at the banquet to anoint the Lord, she is repentant. The other guests still see her as a public sinner, but Christ says, «No longer. Today she is justified because she has loved much. She has embraced repentance and turned away in sorrow from her faults» (Luke 7:36-50). This is the justification of God. This justice is not achieved by the law or by human effort. It must come from God; it is an undeserved present; it is a stupendous gift of the Lord.

This is the justification that the Pharisees do not understand. They think they are superior to Matthew and the publicans because they keep the law, but Paul tells them that that means nothing; it is mere appearance. In human terms it may be worth something, but what interests God is the justice that only he gives and that we receive. What God wants is mercy and a profound sense of commitment to him. The justification God offers us makes us participants in his divine life; it makes us sisters and brothers of his only Son, Jesus Christ; it makes us heirs and participants in his eternal glory. It is the great satisfaction sinners feel when their sins have been forgiven. I had the good fortune to visit what they claim is the tomb of Abraham in Hebron; it is called *El Kalil*, which means «friend». Abraham was God's friend because God justified him, and every person justified by God can be called *El Kalil*, the friend of God. Even if they were sinners, God has now justified them (Jas 2:23). This is the justification God offers us. It is not through human effort; it is not through the law; it is a free, unmerited gift of God who justifies whomever he wants, but he doesn't justify those who try to ascend toward God by their pride. Impossible! God alone calls people to justification.

But that God is not a God we're unable to find. That is what is most amazing. God became man and walked along human highways in order to encounter people. In Christ we find God's justification. Christ is the God who pardons, the God who justifies. Christ is the God who has come not to condemn but to forgive (John 3:17). Christ is the shepherd who goes out in

search of the lost sheep so that they come and join in the joy of his flock of the justified, from which no one is excluded. With what longing he said, «I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold, and they must be brought in» (John 10:16). This is the heart of Jesus, the heart of God beating in a human breast. This is the infinite love of the Lord that searches all the paths of life for you and me and each one of us. No matter how far astray we go, no matter how devoid of faith we find ourselves, no matter how proud or idolatrous of the world's vanities we are, there is the Lord nearby, offering us justification and telling us it is no use to us to have lots of money, lots of power, lots of luxury if we're not converted to God. If God doesn't give you justification, then you are the poorest of the world's wretches. Without God's justification everything is mere appearance. This is the intimate justice God is offering you. In more modern language we talk of grace, forgiveness, reconciliation of God. As far as he's concerned, there is no difficulty in being reconciled with God.

The disposition people should have to receive this justification from God

My second thought concerns the difficulty regarding people's disposition. If God is ready to give, sadly people are not ready to receive. In today's readings we find three indispensable dispositions. Without these God cannot justify anyone because people are really free. Last Sunday we were told, «Before you there are two paths: one leads to blessing, justification, and faithfulness to your God; the other leads to misery, unfaithfulness, idolatry, repudiation of God, and rejection of your faith» (Deut 11:26). What are the three dispositions pointed out in today's readings? They are faith, conversion, and mercy.

First, faith. The second reading gives us the example of Abraham, the prototype of faith. Who is Abraham? A poor *campesino*. He knows nothing of God's revelation. He is not circumcised, nor is he a Jew. He is a man of the world. God calls him when he is already aged and sterile; his wife has borne him no child. Yet God promises him, «A child will be born to you, and he will be the father of many nations. From his descendants will be born the Redeemer of the world» (Rom 4:18). It seems crazy that this would happen to an old man and an old woman, both of them sterile—like corpses, the scripture says (Rom 4:19). But God tells this body that seems dead, this desert of humanity, aged and sterile, that it will blossom again like a garden. Abraham believes. He believes. What does it mean to believe? Believing is accepting the Word of God even when God speaks what is impossible. It is being convinced that God's Word will come true and living by that Word. Faith is giving oneself over to the one who speaks. Believing means not doubting. Abraham acts heroically, I would even say divinely. He understands that everything comes from God's initiative. The human conditions are not important. He is old and sterile, looking half-dead, but he believes: «God, who raises up the dead and gives life to the desert, will also be able to bring forth a populous nation from my sterility and my decay and my death. And most wonderful of all, from this nation will come redemption and eternal life».

That's why Saint Paul says in today's second reading, «Abraham believed, and it was credited to him as righteousness» (Rom 4:22). Abraham was justified at that moment and becomes *El Kalil*, the friend of God, because he gave himself over to God. God has taken the initiative. God is offering justification, and as a condition he asks, «Believe! Have faith!» Abraham could have laughed and said, «Lord, you're crazy! What you're proposing is impossible». But just as Mary believed in the possibility of a fertile virginity, of giving birth while remaining a virgin, so it was with Abraham and Sarah and Elizabeth. All those children of the Old Testament were products of this faith.

How many people in our own time have had children through prayer and beseeching God? Who knows whether my words are being heard now by some parents who thank the Lord because they succeeded after persistent prayer in having a miracle child! On the other hand, there are those who sinfully destroy the fertility God gives them; they prevent the fecundity that God gives them as a blessing from bearing fruit within their bosoms. All those tremendous campaigns of contraceptives and abortions are sins against the faith that Abraham had in the God who bestows on men and women the gift of fertility.

This faith is necessary, sisters and brothers. It's not the law, it's not human effort; it's believing in that same God. This is the first disposition people need to be justified by God: believing. But it is not enough. The prophet Hosea and Christ himself, when dealing with the Pharisees, point out another condition: conversion, being converted.

Being converted means leaving our evil ways and becoming good. Being converted means «changing one's way of thinking». Why are some people scandalized when others change their way of thinking, since this change, if it's for the better, is necessary? People may be deceived; they may be worshiping false passions; they may be comfortably situated; they may be in love with the advantages of this world; they may be one of those who, as Christ says in the gospel, don't want to lose their life because they place great value on earthly benefits and gains (Mark 8:35). But if God is calling them to conversion, to change their way of thinking, then it's necessary for them to be converted. This explains why Christ calls the Pharisees hypocrites. It's not because they were so conscientious in observing the law but because they reduced everything to a human system, as if that contained all the perfection God desires.

God is life. God is evolution. God is newness. God is walking with the history of the people. Those who believe in God should not become attached to traditions and customs, especially when these customs and traditions tarnish the true Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We must always be attentive to the voice of the Spirit. We must be converted and walk according to that Gospel and that calling of the Lord. All those who feel secure and don't think there's any need to change are Pharisees; they're hypocrites and whitened sepulchers (Matt 23:27). They are very sure of themselves, but their conscience keeps scolding them. Being converted to what the Lord wants requires docility and meekness. Abraham is living peacefully in Ur of Chaldea when the Lord tells him, «Go forth from your kinsfolk, and travel to a land that I will show you» (Gen 12:1). God doesn't even say where, but Abraham leaves, walking like a man in a dream, hoping the Lord will tell him where he is to go. Years and generations passed before at last Abraham's descendants returned from Egypt to take possession of the Promised Land. God has all eternity before him. Only God has security. All we can do is humbly follow wherever God wants to lead. Blessed are those who stay faithful to the paths God inspires them to travel. Blessed are those who don't try to please people by living with an uneasy conscience in some place that others think is safe. Leave your kinsfolk! Cast off your false security! Be converted to the Lord! This is the unending road of our pilgrimage of faith.

Something else is needed so that we'll be ready for the grace the Lord is offering us. It's that famous phrase: «I desire mercy, not sacrifice» (Matt 9:13). What beautiful words! It's not that God rejects the sacrifice of our Mass—yes, this is a sacrifice—but he's telling us, «If you're coming to offer me something but have no mercy in your heart—I prefer mercy».

What is mercy? Mercy is the most perfect expression of love. It is love as surrender, as forgiveness, as justice, as living in peace with others. Mercy is not the pride of the Pharisees who despise the outcasts; rather, it is the embrace of God who, though super-rich, has come to seek out both the poor and those who don't want to sit down and eat with them. Mercy is goodness expressed in deeds and not in words. All of us understand mercy better because we've all done some small act of mercy for others, and above all because we've all been the recipients of mercy. If God had not been merciful to us when we fell into so many sins, where would we be? If God did not have the mercy to forgive us before he died, where would we go? And perhaps also in our human relationships we've known many acts of mercy done by us or done for us. Blessed are those whose lives have been filled with many merciful acts! That is what God desires!

That is why the church preaches social justice, Christian love, and appreciation of one another as sisters and brothers. That is why the church rejects violence as the way to solve problems. That is why the church decries bribes and kidnappings and other things which are becoming stylish and to which we are sadly becoming accustomed. The church cannot agree with any of this because it means a rejection of mercy.

«I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Your prayers do not please me if they come from a rancorous heart. Don't pray to me; don't offer me Masses if you're coming with injustices, if your hands are stained with blood, with hatred, with violence. I want mercy first» (Matt 9:13). How magnificent this complaint of our Lord! And how opportune it is for our time, when Christ and the church keep telling us that our national problems will be solved not through repression, not by force, not by unjust and arbitrary laws, but only when the hearts of all men and women embrace what God desires. «I desire mercy, nothing else». What restores and justifies humanity is precisely this path of the Lord.

The mission of the church and the prophets: preparing people to receive God's justification

And so, sisters and brothers, I arrive at my final point. What is the mission of the church? What is the mission of the prophets? We find the mission in Hosea; we find it in Christ himself in the midst of sinners; and we find it in Saint Paul who gives us the example of Abraham. The mission of the church is to proclaim the wonders of God's mercy. This is her primary mission, and it is accompanied by a second calling, the summoning of people to faith, to conversion, and to mercy. And a third mission is denouncing all sin, everything that works against our relationship with God, against faith, against truth, against mercy—everything that prevents us from making ourselves ready for God's coming.

The church's mission is the same as John the Baptist's: preparing in people's hearts the paths by which God can work their justification (Luke 3:4). If from this pulpit there is condemnation of the sins of society, the sins of authority, the sins of families, it is not for the sake of facile demagogery. No one finds it harder to speak about the evils of his own people than I do, sisters and brothers, but I have the pastoral obligation, by command of the Gospel and Jesus Christ who takes away the sins of the world, to point out what is sinful and what should not prevail and what path we must take. What I have preached always is conversion, faith, mercy. Only mean and unworthy slander can find anything else in my words. What I want to echo to my beloved people are the words of Hosea, the words of Paul, the words of Christ, the words of the church. This is what I announce to them all without exception, including the sinners,

because when Christ reprimanded the people of his time, he did not hate them but loved them. He wanted to rescue them from the claws of idolatry and their false beliefs so that they might seek the true way and so encounter the mercy God offers them for forgiveness and justification.

That is why the church will continue to do her duty, and that is why the church cannot preach in disembodied language. The church must point out—and you yourselves can analyze the cases of this past week—who the persons are who are walking on the paths of faith, conversion, and mercy and, on the other hand, who the persons are who are moving contrary to faith, mercy, and conversion. In all of the events of this week, which we could call a very gray week, there are many people who are walking toward salvation. Blessed be God! But there are also many people who don't want to accept the gift of the Lord which seeks to justify them, and so they turn their backs on God and offend the Lord.

Events of the week

On May 23 the United Nations began its General Assembly meeting, which will last five weeks. Eighteen heads of state and forty-two ministers will participate in this meeting, which will deal with the costs of the arms race in the world. Military spending in the world increases every year. In the papers you read astronomical figures like 300 to 400 billion a year. I've even forgotten how to write a billion; I had to write it down on paper. So many zeroes to make a billion! Much more than a million. That means that every day the world splurges one billion dollars on military spending. Pope Paul VI therefore has good reason to send a representative to this meeting. (I say this for the sake of those who claim I'm meddling in politics when I speak about these things). Through his representative the pope has said that if he is going to speak in this assembly, it is not because he is a world power or has political authority, but because he cannot fail to provide moral support to this effort of humanity, using as a shield the church's timeless character¹. With his moral authority he urges that this process be accelerated because «tomorrow may be too late»—those are the pope's words. He is saying the same as what he said when he spoke in the United Nations²—I think it was in 1965—and also when he complained in India³ about the huge amounts of money that human madness was wasting in military expenses while whole worlds were still in the process of development. He urged instead that they consider how those billions could be dedicated to development in the world. Who dares say that the pope is meddling in politics? It is his moral authority that is crying out against the abuses of humankind.

We also rejoiced when the newspapers announced⁴ that the president of the new legislative assembly stated that the pending matters before that body include the petition of general amnesty for political prisoners, the repeal of the Law of Public Order, and other matters that merit immediate attention and satisfactory resolution. Blessed be God that the assembly is taking account of the cries of the people! I would ask the assembly president to search among the tabled motions and add to the agenda the request concerning abortion legislation that the Salvadoran bishops made to the previous assembly. No mind was paid us, nor did we receive an answer. Hopefully the assembly president will bring up for discussion

¹ «PAUL VI, «Message to the General Assembly of United Nations», 24 May 1978. This message was read to the plenary assembly by Archbishop Agostino Casaroli on 7 June 1978. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (18 June 1978).

² PAUL VI, «A Message to Humanity», address to the General Assembly of United Nations, 4 October 1965.

³ PAUL VI, «Message to the World», allocution in Bombay to journalists of the international press, 4 December 1964.

⁴ «Assembly Takes an Inventory of the Most Urgent Matters» in *El Mundo* (6 June 1978).

again all these rights that we Salvadorans demand but that get lost in bureaucracy; he will see the justice of these demands which the assembly, as servants of the people, must duly consider.

Then again, where are we going in other respects? The National Guard carried out a house-to-house search in Mejicanos and arrested, among others, a mother and her six-month-old child. As *La Crónica* justly stated, «From every point of view, the arrest of a recently born child is anti-juridical and violates the most elementary norms of law»⁵. We also must lament the arrests made in El Tablón, El Jicarón, and El Paisnal.

It is also shameful that in the women's prison there is a woman who is suffering attacks of hysteria as the result of torture she and her husband suffered during the conflict at the Central Azucarera. Moreover, their two children, a four-year old and a two-year old, witnessed the torture of their parents and are in a state of extreme depression.

The campaign of terror and fear continues in the villages of San Pedro Perulapán. Román Martín, aged sixty, was killed, leaving behind a wife and six children. Alfonso Mendoza, also aged sixty, was arrested in his house while he slept⁶.

On the other hand, we want to congratulate reporters on this Day of Freedom of the Press. The president sent them a telegram assuring them that he will continue to guarantee freedom of the press. We read in the valiant publication, *La Crónica*, their denunciation of the illegal economic aggression that the state has been inflicting on that journalistic endeavor since 1972⁷. The report says that the whole campaign is aimed at destroying by economic asphyxiation the journalistic labors that *La Crónica del Pueblo* has been developing to advance the people's interests.

I take advantage of this opportunity to ask: in the name of what freedom of the press are agents of ORDEN making Radio YSAX appear to be a contraband station, so that many *campesinos* have to listen to it in secret? And in the name of what freedom of the press is our newspaper *Orientación* being treated as evidence of a crime committed and so seized as something suspect?

I want to remind you—blessed be God!— that freedom of the press is a right that must be guaranteed. It is one of the primary obligations of the government to protect it as part of the common good. People should be assured that they have the right to be informed of the truth and not be manipulated by mass media with only one ideological tendency, as is so evidently the case now.

Publications also have the right and the obligation to keep morality in mind. Not everything can be published. By what right and in the name of what freedom do they publish highly offensive pamphlets and do so with official backing? How can they allow flyers defamatory of the church to be distributed everywhere by members of ORDEN or put in people's mailboxes? Let us have a true sense of freedom, shown by the respect paid to press freedom both by the government and by those working in these media of public opinion.

⁵ *La Crónica del Pueblo* (10 June 1978).

⁶ «Solidarity:ORDEN Continues to Repress *Campesinos* with Impunity» in *Orientación* (18 June 1978). Román Martín is called Román Matías in the report of *Orientación*.

⁷ «Open Letter of the Director of *La Crónica* to the President» in *La Crónica del Pueblo* (8 June 1978).

And you also, dear sisters and brothers, should know how to use press freedom with wisdom and discernment. Not everything that comes into your hands is true or moral. That is why we have Christian criteria that help us discern. We are able to say, «This is a lie. They made them publish this. This is untrue. This is immoral. This is intolerable». Pope Pius XII used to say, «When you buy a ticket to enter a theater, you're giving your vote to the show that will be presented there. If the film is pornographic, then you're voting in favor of pornography. The same is true of the other means of communication: when they're used for lewd purposes and not for true freedom, they are violations of true freedom».

In this regard also, the press has reported that the police in Guatemala detained a religious sister, Raimunda Alonso, in relation to the bloodshed that occurred in Panzós; she was accused of indoctrinating the *campesinos*⁸. We've had the opportunity to speak with this sister and her provincial, and we celebrated a very emotional Eucharist in their convent in Santa Tecla, where she was preparing to leave for Spain. According to statements of the sister and her provincial, Sister Raimunda had no relationship with the *campesinos* who suffered the repression in Panzós. She worked about ninety kilometers from there, in Cahabón, and was dedicated exclusively to pastoral work; she was therefore unjustly detained, imprisoned and expelled. The mother provincial has sent the true story to the newspapers; I hope they make use of press freedom and publish her clarification. As the provincial concludes her report, which is truly moving—I ask the press to publish it just for its literary value—she states:

The truth of the case is this. I know the problems of the place where Sister Raimunda was working, and I am also aware of the problems in other indigenous areas where I had the good fortune of working some time ago. The problem is not whether Sister Raimunda is involved in politics or not. This certainly is not our mission. I know that this sister, during the eight years she was in Cahabón, did her work in the humane way that befits us as religious. Her mission has been proclaiming God's word to the people of the Kekchí area. The message of God's word, when it is really proclaimed and received, brings about transformation and commitment. This has been the case with our people: they have matured in their faith, and this has led them to change their lives. They begin to be somebody, to think for themselves, to make decisions, to improve their living conditions, and to integrate themselves and their culture into the culture of the country. Accompanying and encouraging the people in this process has been and still is the work of our sisters. Is this politics? This was the work of our Sister Raimunda during the eight years she worked in Cahabón, where she determined from the start to give herself over to «her people», as she called them. She began by learning the Kekchí language, which helped her identify with them and experience their problems⁹.

On June 6 there was repression of the workers of the Supply Regulation Institute in San Martín and Usulután.

A statement was published in the name of the Committee of the Laity. I want to make it clear that this is not a committee that is dependent on the hierarchy. The laity have a right to form their committees and to speak freely, in accord with Christian principles. This does not involve the thought of the hierarchy.

⁸ See *Diario de Hoy* (9 June 1978).

⁹ «Comunicqué of Sister Nieves Martínez, Provincial prioress of the Dominicans of the La Anunciata, Regarding the Capture and Expulsion from Guatemala of Sister Raimunda Alonso» in *Orientación* (18 June 1978).

In view of all these unfortunate events and the extreme poverty in our rural areas, we are restructuring Cáritas so that it can truly be a means by which those who need help can be assisted by those who are able to help. In the name of Christian charity I extend my hand again to beg everyone to contribute grains, clothing (especially for children), medicines, and money to be able to help all those in need.

With joy I want to mention here the words of a Japanese reporter who visited me to become informed about our situation and to ask what we thought about the abduction of Mister Matsumoto. He told me that he had never been interested in the church or Christianity, but when he saw this situation of ours, where the church is committed to the needs of the people and the suffering of humanity, he wanted to visit me and see what I thought. I told him, «Blessed be God! That's what the church is. Nothing human is foreign to her». He asked me if I would be willing to mediate if I were asked to do so in the case of the kidnapping of Mister Matsumoto. I told him that, as always, the church is willing to help in every way, especially when it involves helping those in need and consoling those who are suffering.

Life of the church

This week Father Gonzalo López will be installed as the new pastor in Comasagua. He will take possession on Thursday at ten o'clock in the morning. I invite the whole vicariate of the department of La Libertad to be present in Comasagua on Thursday at ten o'clock in the morning.

This morning at eleven o'clock the new church of Saint Anthony of Padua in Planes de Renderos will be consecrated. I congratulate the Franciscan Fathers, and I invite everyone to pay honor to this popular saint and to come see the new church consecrated to him.

In like manner, I am always seeking your help to continue the labors on our main church, the cathedral. This work has to be the fruit of our faith and our efforts, which, thank God, are making themselves felt more each day. The day of the pope will be celebrated on July 2, which will be a better day since it's Sunday. In two weeks, then, we will consecrate this eight o'clock Mass to the pope. God willing, we'll have present here a Latin American bishop working in the United States; he will lend a sense of the church's universality to the homage we'll pay to the church's common pastor. I'll have the good fortune of greeting the pope and manifesting my allegiance to him during my next trip to Rome, which I also commend to your prayers.

My sisters and brothers, having meditated on the word of God and shed its light on some of our reality, I ask you once again: who are the people who are getting their lives in order so that God can justify them and save them? And who in the maelstrom of our land are doing the opposite, turning their backs on God, disobeying his laws, and defacing his image in the human person? With this reflection, then, on the paths toward justification that God wants us to travel, I conclude this homily by orienting us toward the Eucharist. We have come to Mass above all to participate in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Let us not forget his fiery language: «I don't want sacrifices when there is no mercy» (Matt 9:13). I hope that all of us who are going to participate now in this altar of the Divine Savior of the world know the supreme value of charity, love, and mercy. Let it be so.