

160

THE DIVINE SAVIOUR OF THE WORLD HAS THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE

Twenty-first Sunday of Ordinary Time
26 August 1979

Joshua 24:1-2a,15-17,18b

Ephesians 5:21-32

John 6:61-70

Dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio listeners, there are moments when the tempest of history grows stronger, creating confusion, anguish, discouragement, and pessimism. Even a pastor, who should be a sign of calmness and sure guidance, can appear disoriented, as if his faith were failing. There is violence, there is disorder, and there is vice as well. There are honest people who believe that they are good because they have committed no wrong, but they forget that being good is not defined by negation. Being good means doing all the good that can be done. In a word, we are engulfed in a storm of confusion.

We hear people say at times, «There is no salvation!» or «This is a dead-end street!» We thank God, sisters and brothers, that in the face of such pessimism and bewilderment we Christians can rely on a voice that has been resounding in our ears during the whole month of August: «This is my beloved Son. Listen to him!» (Matt 17:5). And today's gospel tells us, «He has the words of eternal life» (John 6:68). It is a calm voice full of light. It's like when you know that beyond the storm clouds there is a clear sky where the sun is shining brightly; you know that the storm and its clouds will pass, and the sun will shine again in the sky. Let us have faith!

It is providential that during this month of the Divine Patron of our country the Sunday liturgies have been presenting the magnificent sixth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. In this Scripture we acquire true knowledge of this Christ who in our country is called the Divine Savior of the world. He is the One who will save us!

The Sundays in August have turned out to be a true school for learning about Christ. If you recall, we can sum up the lessons as follows. Everything began with the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (John 6:1-13). The people were happy because they had been fed and the hunger of their stomachs had been satisfied, but Christ wanted to do more. Therefore, the second phase of this chapter is a theological reflection given by Jesus Christ himself, the teacher of history who knows the truth of things and the truth of God, the foundation stone of all that exists. Christ told the people, «In this bread that you have seen multiplied, you will discover the true bread that has come down from heaven to give life to the world» (John 6:33). And that bread is Christ: «I am the bread that came down from heaven for the life of the world» (John 6:51).

In that reflection Christ also revealed to us a key point of our Catholic faith, namely, that he is present through his flesh, the same flesh that was tormented on the cross, even while united to the eternal Father, to give us eternal life (John 6:51b,54). It is his flesh that is given to us in the Mass and in Communion; he is eucharistically present in the church.

After Christ has given us this theological reflection that only he, naturally, can give us, the sixth chapter concludes with the passage that was read today. Since we can draw three conclusions from the whole of this sermon in Capernaum, I'm going to give my homily a title that sums up our themes during the entire month of August: «The Divine Savior Has the Words of Eternal Life». The three idea of the homily will be the three conclusions of this transcendently beautiful discourse of the Lord in Capernaum: first, the words of Christ: «The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63); second, the response of Peter in the name of all believers: «To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life» (John 6:68); and the third conclusion, which is also important for all of us: the need for this flesh that counts for nothing to be in solidarity with the words of eternal life, which are the words that give life.

The flesh counts for nothing

First, let us analyze this statement that Christ makes by way of conclusion: «The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63). We should not understand this to mean that Christ is proclaiming the complete uselessness of our humanity. Rather, Christ is speaking of the impotency of human flesh, its inability to attain eternal life. He is simply stating that God alone possesses transcendence and human flesh on its own can never reach that transcendence.

What is flesh? We have already analyzed its meaning, and we have carefully considered what Christ in this discourse calls «my flesh for the life of the world» (John 6:51b). That phrase, we said, refers to Christ's flesh which was united with the sacrifice on the cross that saved the world and also united intimately with the God of eternal life. This flesh of Christ serves as a vehicle for granting us salvation and eternal life. We're not talking about the divine flesh of Christ; we are talking about what he calls «flesh», that is, the flesh of people in general, all human life. This is the human flesh descended from Adam as it exists now in the present situation. It is what Saint Paul calls the «earthly human being» who has lost original grace.

We shouldn't forget that our Christian faith teaches that humanity goes back in time to a lost paradise. We were created by God in justice and holiness, but when our first parents disobeyed the command of God, they lost that justice and holiness which had elevated them to the level of God. As a result, they remained in what theology calls a state of fallen nature. It's like when an eagle has lost its feathers: it desires to fly but it cannot fly; or it's like a bird whose wings have been clipped. We don't often reflect on original sin, for it makes us sad to think that human beings, because of that original fault, have lost their ability to fly toward the infinite; they have been deprived of the ability to enjoy the transcendent life of God.

The sin of a newborn child is not a personal sin. Babies cannot sin because they don't have free will yet, but they are born deprived of something they should have. In the beginning God wanted all children to be born in justice and in grace, but because of the disobedience of our first parents, they are not. Imagine a man who, through the kindness of his boss, is given the opportunity to live on a property with all his family. All the children born there should be happy, but the head of that family is disobedient so the boss tells him, «Depart from here because we can't go on this way». After that, the children who are born outside the

property are not to blame themselves, but they are deprived of the privilege. Similarly, grace was a privilege for human beings, and God took it away from them so that they were then born without that privilege. This is what Christ calls «flesh»: fallen humanity, humanity without grace, without justice, without divine adoption.

But naturally this flesh, even when deprived of the life of God, has capacities for things of the earth. Original sin is not something that can be tangibly sensed. Fallen human beings who are in original sin today look the same as they would have looked if grace had not been lost. If all of us here in the cathedral were in God's grace, there would be no outward way to tell. That means that even if the flesh is helpless with regard to the divine order that was lost, it still can do many things here on earth.

I want to explain to you now a modern concept that will help you understand the relationship between fallen humanity and humanity rescued by the redemption of Christ. Whether humanity is fallen or rescued, there exists in the world today a current of thought called «secularization». Pay close attention because I want to explain to you something that is important for you to keep in mind. Secularization is a way of thinking that insists on the autonomy of created things but with openness toward God. I repeat: the word «secularization» seeks to describe the present state of humanity; it holds that the things of the earth are autonomous, but at the same time it recognizes the sovereignty of God. It means something different from another word, «secularism», that can be confused with this one.

Secularism is evil. It also proclaims the autonomy of created things, but it is closed off to God. It says, «God has nothing to do with us here». Do you see the big difference? Secularization says, «Technology, human relations, and all the things we humans do have their own laws. We can do things for ourselves without asking everything of God, but always keeping God in mind». On another occasion I told you what the scientist exclaimed when he was preparing for a trip to the moon, «Everything technology had to do is ready. This trip must produce results, but now all we can do is commend its success to God». This is true secularization, the autonomy of science and technology. We don't have to pray to God for everything. The Council says that previously people prayed to God because they hoped to receive from God many things that they couldn't do for themselves (GS 33). But there has been much progress in our modern age. We know that today there are fertilizers, insecticides, and other materials that people have invented; they do things that perhaps before would have been considered miracles. Miracles still exist because human beings reach a limit beyond which they cannot go. But as long as people move within their limits, they are in their own sphere and therefore autonomous. That is what is called secularization. People have become secularized, a word that comes from *saeculum*, meaning «age» or «world». It means that people have gained competence in the world and in history through the many inventions they have that give them ever greater control. But it will always remain true that, no matter how much progress humans make, God will always be above and beyond it all, encompassing humanity in its every dimension. And the more developed human beings become personally, the greater the glory they will give to God, so that God will always be the Lord of humankind, the Lord of technology, the Lord of history. That's why when Christ says, «The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63), he is not talking about secularization but is telling people not to close themselves off to the Absolute.

In today's readings we have some excellent examples of secularization. The first reading from the Old Testament, for example, is concerned only with the immediate world.

There had not yet been any revelation of the absolute, the eternal, the intimate life of God in all its fullness. For that reason the people of the Old Testament found their happiness in the things of earth: in possessing wealth, in being freed from Egypt, in walking toward a promised land. But as Christians we realize that all these things were signs that there exists an eternal life which is the true promised land, as Saint Paul tells us (1 Cor 10:11).

Today's second reading deals with matrimony. My great concern, my dear sisters and brothers who are married, is that you can have two views of your marriage. One is the perspective of secularization, by which you see the true human values in matrimony, but always in openness to the sign of the infinite. Saint Paul tell us that marriage has something of divine significance. Some people fail to discover that divine mystery and so live their married lives in a secular way; their matrimony is for them only something human, a contract between a man and a woman. At best, it manifests the love between a man and a woman, but it does not transcendently elevate them to the status of a son and a daughter of God who reflect in the world the Lord's infinite love, the love with which Christ loves his church (Eph 5:25).

Let us hope that all married couples will discover the transcendent significance of matrimony even while respecting its autonomy. Let the husband be respected as a true figure of Christ, one who has a responsibility to give his life for his wife, even to being killed on a cross. And let the wife be seen as the sign of a church faithful to the Lord, as one who despite martyrdom and persecution pours out her blood for him. When matrimony is transformed and made transcendent, then it will have a truly marvelous dimension. Even the secular laws governing inheritance and earthly matters will take on a new aspect. But if a couple fails to discover that divine dimension of love that unites the family, they will always be in danger of coming apart as all human things do. If we ask why so many marriages fail and why so many families disintegrate, the answer is here: they have not relied on the Absolute; they have not seriously considered the transcendent mission they have on earth. They have tried to live only at the human level; they don't even pray; they don't turn toward God and reflect to the world the image of God that should be reflected in every marriage. «The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63).

In today's gospel especially we find signs of the immanence of earthly things: the people are content only with what is seen. They don't transcend the visible to reflect on the divine signs. That's what Christ told them: «You are looking for me because I gave you bread to nourish your stomachs. Do not seek the bread that perishes. Seek rather the bread that gives eternal life» (John 6:26-27). The bread in the desert was something ambivalent. Those who were secularized, closed off to the Absolute, were satisfied with having bread for the stomach, money for the pocket, earthly things to enjoy. But those who thought like Jesus Christ rose above the bread that could be eaten; while eating their tortillas, they lifted their hearts to the Lord who gave them food so that they would not die. Christ also recalled the manna: «Your ancestors ate it, but they died. It did not give immortality, but the bread that I am giving you will give you immortality» (John 6:58). Those who accept it and consume it by faith are accepting Jesus Christ.

Secularization must be respected because we're obliged to discover the wonders of God. Wise and learned people with their mathematics discovered the physical forces of the elements and produced fuels powerful enough to launch something as adventurous as a journey to the moon, but they did not make the energy that carried them there, nor did they make the mathematics of their calculations. All those efforts were simply discovering what God

had made so that people could learn about it. That is what's called secularization. «There are the things», says God. «Possess the earth and govern it» (Gen 1:28). When engineers build highways through mountains and valleys that seem impossible, they are dominating the earth. When they build tall skyscrapers, they are dominating matter. Human beings, as images of God, are working with their Father God to make life more beautiful, more organized, and more pleasant. This is secularization: when people work as if everything depended on them but pray as if everything depended on God.

In contrast, secularism is sinful. Secularism means closing yourself off to God. It is the foolish position of the atheist who says, «I don't believe in God». The wiser the person is, the more foolish such a position is because true wisdom should lead us to connect with that God whom humble people accept by faith, following a simpler path: «I believe in God». Truly wise persons, in discovering the laws of technology and art and science, also arrive at God as if led by the hand. If the scientific conclusions of smart persons lead them to say that God does not exist, then they are like the students who have been given a problem by their teacher and have failed to solve it. The teacher tells them, «Do the problem again. It's not right». So also, God ought to say to all the atheists, «You think you're wise. You're professionals at the university, scientists who can laugh at the little old woman who's praying because you no longer believe—and still she prays. But you got the problem wrong». Atheists, you're more ignorant than the old woman. Work again on the religious problem, and you'll find that God exists: the God of mathematics, the God of astronomy, the God of laws, the God of medicine, the God of engineering, the God of everything that people can invent. You must encounter God if you want your scientific problem to come out right and if your secularization is true. But if instead you make yourself a secularist, you are sinning. Secularism limits itself only to the autonomy of this life and this age and boldly declares, «Here God has nothing to do».

In today's readings we find some examples of secularism. What does the first reading say? It presents us with the beautiful sight of Joshua as the head of the people who are about to enter the Promised Land. (Moses had died before they arrived and had commissioned Joshua to finish the task.) As they entered among those Canaanite peoples who worshiped false gods, Joshua addressed the Israelites, who had traveled from Egypt and the far side of the Euphrates and who had also worshiped false gods: «Remember that it was the true God who brought us out of Egypt, who led us through the desert, and who is giving us this land. Here there are many false gods. I do not know whether you will worship the true God or will want to return instead to the worship of the gods of Egypt or the gods of the Canaanites. I and my family are going to adore the only Lord, the God who has done marvelous deeds, the God who freed us from Egypt. What do you say?» (Josh 24:15). The people responded to this challenge of Joshua with the words: «Keep far from us any god except the one and only God» (Josh 24:16).

What is being denounced here is secularism. All those who adore idols are unbelievers in the true God; they have decided in favor of secularism and are closed off to the transcendence of the true God. Idolatry was not a characteristic only of those times; in our own days also there are forms of idolatry. Joshua could return to life and say to Salvadoran society and Salvadoran politicians, «There are many idols in this land: money idols, political idols, organizational idols, fleshly idols, and all those idols of vice, alcohol, and drugs! If you want to be true Christians, then declare whether you're willing to adore the true God. There is only one God, and you must cease adoring those false idols!» Since the church is now proclaiming the existence of one true God, as Joshua did, the idolaters get angry because they don't want their false worship to be disturbed. But the church would not be fulfilling her obligation if she were

to join forces with idolaters and so fail to announce the truth to the faithful who want to follow the Gospel, namely that there is only one Lord and he alone is to be served. We worship him because he is the Lord who is saving our nation.

Returning again to the theme of matrimony in the second reading, there is also the danger of absolutizing matrimony, such as when it is made a sign of carnality instead of being a sign of the divine. I think many marriages are in crisis because of this: they have focused only on the sexual value of marriage. This explains the shameless campaigns in favor of contraceptives and abortion; all that matters is the pleasure of the man and the woman. But what is absolute in marriage is not the sexual or the carnal, for as Christ says, «The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63). The flesh serves only to give us a sense of the divine. If married persons have made pleasure their only god and have sacrificed to it fertility, honesty, purity, and the holiness of matrimony, then they are committing idolatry and have sullied a law of God. Their marriage is secularist and closed off to the Absolute. As much as they may pray, if they don't pray with a conscience that is open to God and ready to obey his laws even in the intimacy of matrimony, they cannot be said to be true worshipers of the Lord. This is an example of the kind of absolutization and frightful secularism that is causing much evil among us.

The gospels also tell us of cases of secularism and repudiation of the divine, such as the times when Christ felt rejected. Today's gospel is very sad. After the magnificent things Christ had revealed, he might have expected acclaim from all the people that were following him, but now he was in danger of being left all alone. «They began to go away», says today's gospel (John 6:66). His disciples were leaving him, and when only the Twelve were left, Christ asked them, «“Do you want to leave also?”» (John 6:67). It was a moment of crisis, and it reveals that the real reason people leave Christ is that he does not preach what they want to hear. «Ah», they said, «we were expecting a political Messiah! We wanted a Messiah who would always give us bread to fill our stomachs! We were following him to get material things, but now all that has come to naught» (John 6:15,26). Today's gospel tells us that the people were murmuring against Jesus and criticizing him: «This saying is harsh. Who can accept it?» (John 6:60).

The bread of true Gospel preaching is always criticized, but Christ didn't take back his words when they criticized him, when they left him, or even when he was betrayed by Judas, who preferred thirty coins to the Lord's friendship. Christ was resolved to be alone if necessary. But not really alone, for he was alone with his Father, who was his mainstay. Being alone with God is the only thing of value—and of course preaching God's truth. Those who want to follow truth will follow not the person who preaches it but God himself. That's why Christ asked, «Do you want to leave also?» Peter's reply gives us guidance: «To whom shall we go, Lord? You alone have the words of eternal life» (John 6:67,68). The idols that other people follow remain behind when the worshipers die. The idols betray them. There is nothing worse than a fallen politician or an impoverished rich person whom the idols have abandoned. How sad is the case of the former president of Nicaragua, who today cannot find a country in which to live! How sad is the fall of a man who worshiped a god who cannot save him! What use is all that money and all that power at the hour of death? «You alone, Lord, have the words of eternal life» (John 6:68b).

Events of the week

I think it would be good, sisters and brothers, to pause here a bit and to consider whether we are living in a sinful situation of secularism. I believe a lot of sinfulness does indeed exist and that the church, like Joshua, must tell Salvadoran society to stop committing idolatry and be converted to the true God. You yourselves can analyze the news that you all know about already.

What tremendous importance they're giving to these next free elections! At the same time the political parties say they're skeptical. There is no ambience of truth. We can read in the manifesto of the UDN party the conditions that would make it possible for them to believe in free elections:

First, cessation of the repression against the Catholic Church, the political parties, labor unions, and other people's organizations, without any discrimination.

Second, freedom for all political prisoners and disappeared persons, or a clear explanation of what fate was suffered by those who were killed. [In the small towns that I visit, there exists a horrible anguish, one that can be felt only there. I remember an elderly woman sitting in her little house, recalling the support her son and her husband gave her; she told me, «They took them away, and I haven't seen them again»].

Third, punishment of those who are guilty of violating the constitution and of crimes against the Salvadoran people.

Fourth, dissolution of the death squads of UGB, FALANGE, Mano Blanca, and ORDEN, which serve as instruments of state repression and whose purpose is to harass and destroy the people's organizations. (Applause)

Fifth, return of all those who have been exiled since 1972.

Sixth, effective freedom to organize labor unions and political groups both in the city and in the countryside. All existing organizations of agricultural workers and *campesinos* must be given legal recognition and support without any discrimination.

Effective recognition of the workers' right to strike and elimination of the legal, administrative, and de facto obstacles which now make it inoperative.

Freedom of expression, of assembly, of association, and of demonstration in the whole national territory, to which end a stop must be put to all police and military activities and procedures being used presently to annul in practice the exercise of rights and freedoms¹.

After listing these eight points, which are not in the least being observed, the declaration adds: «Compliance with these demands will merely begin to create the premises and conditions that will make it possible to undertake, with effective citizen participation, the solution of the serious political problems which they have imposed on the country», and so on². So you have now a secularism of repression which everyone is feeling.

I would also like to say something, sisters and brothers, that was not published in the newspapers, yet it is a scandal for the country. It is the law that the Legislative Assembly passed on July 25, which provided a defense budget of 52,000,000 *colones*³. Where does this

¹ «Declaration of the National Executive Committee of the United Democratic Nationalist Party», published under the headline «UDN Opposes Participation in the 1980 Elections» in *El Diario de Hoy* (22 August 1979). [The bracketed comments reflect Archbishop Romero's interpolation into the declaration.]

² *Ibid.*

³ *Diario Oficial* (9 August 1979).

money come from? This is even more scandalous: 4,000,000 from the Ministry of Planning and Coordination of Social and Economic Development; 1,500,000 from the Ministry of the Interior; 1,400,000 from the Ministry of Justice; 7,600,000 from the Ministry of Education, that is, weapons at the cost of our schools; 9,000,000 from the Ministry of the Economy; 4,100,000 from the Ministry of Agriculture; and 18,000,000 from the Ministry of Public Works. That makes a total of fifty-two million *colones* pilfered from the works the people need and given to the army so that they can obtain more weapons. This is unjust! This is precisely the absolutism of a government that wants to rely solely on the brute force of weapons and not on culture! (Applause)

By way of commenting on this scandal of granting millions for the reinforcement of the army, I would like to repeat the commentary offered by YSAX: «Are these fifty-two million destined for the democratization of the country and the well-being of all?»⁴

In the field of labor, several union organizations have issued a courageous statement in which they speak about the need to revise the labor code. They had been invited to a consultation by the Ministry of Labor, but on July 31 they asked for reasonable time to prepare a project of reforms: «Considering that the topic had not been studied in depth and or in consultation with the union membership, the organizations asked the Ministry of Labor for a space of ninety days, but there has still been no response to their request»⁵. I don't believe that decisions in union matters can be imposed from above. The voice of the workers and the unions must be heard, so that any law passed truly corresponds to the reality of our people. Let us hope that agreement is reached quickly because the systematic strikes are seriously affecting the life of our nation.

We have to thank God that the situation at La Fabril was resolved on Thursday, after three and a half months of negotiations and two months of strike. Both sides ceded something, so that a final arrangement was reached which partially satisfies the demands of the workers. A response is expected next week from the IMES board of directors, which meets in the United States. And negotiations are underway to resolve the conflict at APES, Foremost, and other factories. We hope that in these cases comprehension and goodwill prevail on the part of both labor and management.

Repression and violence continue to sow terror among our people. They found the body of another teacher who was murdered, Mauricio Antonio Menéndez; he was a victim of strangulation and internal injuries.

In the Escuela Urbana-Mixta of El Campamento, Acajutla, the following events have occurred. Since May 26, when the teacher Pedro Colorado was killed there, a number of masked civilians have been coming around and intimidating students. Recently, at the end of August, the men were asking insistently for the school director, who is Sister Adela Guardado López. She contacted the director of basic education and the supervisor of District 0-41, both of whom counseled her to leave. That same day, the men searched the school, broke into the director's office, and stole the school seal. What we find strange is that this Catholic institution, a school of Fe y Alegría, has not raised its voice.

⁴ El Salvador: Between Terror and Hope, UCA Editores, San Salvador, 1982, 429-430.

⁵ «Press Release of the Trade Union Organizations» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (18 August, 1979).

In the community of Aguilares some very ugly things have occurred. I asked for reports from the parish there and was horrified when they told me about the killings, the arrests by the security forces, and the persons disappeared since May. But worst of all were the raids of July 20. A combined operation of the National Guard, the Treasury Police, and soldiers invaded Valle Nuevo, Tres Ceibas, Buena Vista, Loma de Ramos, Mirandilla, and El Zapote. In Tres Ceibas they demolished and burned the old school building; they burned the house of Mrs. Luz Rivera viuda de Calles. They tied up Pedro Dolores Rivera and then beat him and burned his feet. They beat up Mariano Canales and Osmaro Contreras. They made Bernardina Carrero remove everything from her house because they intended to burn it down, and they told her they were sparing her life only because she was pregnant.

At two o'clock in the afternoon of August 15, they entered Tres Ceibas with four trucks of National Guards and soldiers, a bulldozer, and a Red Cross unit with medical personnel. They claimed that they were not there for purposes of violence but were giving a civics course and providing medicine. All types of meetings have been prohibited, and after six o'clock in the evening no one can walk outside. They said they would be there for twenty-two days. On Friday the seventeenth they detonated bombs above the village, and they've been keeping surveillance on all the places in the mountains where the poor *campesinos* are sleeping since it's unsafe for them to stay in their homes. It's ironic: they present themselves as benefactors bringing medicines and offering cultural events, but at the same time they are killing and murdering and beating the people. (Applause) Wouldn't it be more advantageous to give these millions of *colones* to the respective ministries so that they can do this work better, instead of depriving them of funds with which they can do much good for the people? Are these «peaceful occupations»—in quotation marks—anything other than simple camouflage for activities that continue to harass our suffering people? (Applause)

The corpses of six men and one woman were found on the main highway on Friday. One of them was the *campesino* Francisco Fuentes Landaverde, whose family had presented a petition of habeas corpus, declaring that he had been arrested on August 15, 1979. The arrest took place in El Coyolito at one of those fearsome checkpoints in the northern zone, manned by soldiers and guards. We fear that the other bodies are those of Eugenio Francisco Guardado⁶ and Esperanza Manjívar de Guardado, whom we have spoken about on other occasions.

Also, the relatives of Professor Valle and the seven other persons killed near the Children's Park have asked for an investigation of that crime.

We also denounce the arrest of the following persons and the abuse of their right of habeas corpus: Mardoquero Arnoldo Castillo Olla of Apaneca, José Efraín Ganuza of Acajatal, and his father, Félix Ganuza, a farmer. These three people are still missing. The families have presented petitions of habeas corpus and have insistently inquired of the security forces, but they always receive the same hypocritical response: «We don't have them. We did not arrest them». There are witnesses who say the opposite. Our poor folk do not lie when they are searching for relief for their great pain!

⁶ Actually, there are two persons being referred to: Eugenio Guardado and Francisco Guardado. See «Solidarity» in *Orientación* (26 August 1979).

On the other hand, the left is also committing awful crimes. The ERP is thought to be responsible for the death of Modesto Jacobo Villata, the councilman of Armenia. Groups of the extreme left have killed two members of ORDEN, and they have also destroyed expensive equipment that was working for the benefit of certain districts. They have opened ditches in the highways to impeded the free flow of traffic, and they're occupying churches without repairing the damage they do. We're not claiming that any of this is helping the situation either.

In a word, it appears that this is a clandestine civil war in which no thought is given to the great evil that we are causing. Now is the time to realize that peace is what our country desperately needs, but it must be peace based on justice.

It is also right for us to support the criminal proceedings regarding the murder of Father Macías. The February 28 People's Leagues have written to the pope and the nuncio in support of justice in this case. We shouldn't forget the final words of Father Macías when he recognized his killers: «They're agents!» and the voice of the people: «It's the same ones!» Let us make sure that innocent *campesinos* are not once again tortured and declared guilty in order to free the security forces of the blame which is theirs. A strange thing happened when the president of the Legislative Assembly and the president of the Supreme Court of Justice extended condolences to me. First of all, I want to tell them that I am not Father Macías's bishop; rather, it is Bishop Aparicio in San Vicente. I suppose they also sent a telegram to him. But I would respond to them by saying, «Since you have power over the laws and justice, I would prefer that, instead of sending me a telegram, you used your power to clarify this crime». (Applause)

This week the death of Father Marcías has given great stimulus and support to those who are calling for justice and an end of the people's suffering, and also to those longing for peace in our country and for unity in the church. As church we recognize our sins, and we have deplored them and wept over them during our vigils of prayer and penance throughout the diocese. I ask the Lord that all this prayer, all this evangelical courage in our diocese, and all this holiness of our wonderful people may obtain from the Lord the blessings that our people so badly need.

«The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63). How right the Lord is to speak these words! When the flesh forgets such spiritual and reasonable concerns as justice and peace, and when secularism lures men into the idolatry of repressing the people and seeking more money and power, then the world becomes a hell because it is not open to heaven and the kingdom of God. The church's mission is therefore to proclaim that kingdom of God that our people so badly need. «The flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63), and that's why our situation is so sinful. The tortured, scalped, and decaying corpses that we keep finding on every roadway and in the hills and valleys of our country are the sign that in El Salvador we have forgotten those words of Christ. They are a sign of flesh that counts for nothing because our flesh decomposes when the spirit departs from it. Let us give meaning to our body and to our being by seeking further in our reflections.

To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life

Our second reflection is drawn from what Peter says to Jesus Christ. When Christ challenged the group of apostles with the question «Do you also want to leave?», Peter, convinced of his faith in Christ, had the courage to say, «Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of

eternal life» (John 6:67, 68). He is proclaiming the transcendence of Christ. Dear sisters and brothers, no matter what happiness we achieve on this earth, our vocation is not complete if it fails to reach transcendence, if it doesn't achieve dialogue with God and intimacy with the Lord. «You have made us for yourself», said Saint Augustine, «and our hearts are restless until they rest in you»⁷.

Today in the gospel the Divine Savior of the world proclaims to us the meaning of his presence in the midst of history. When the people were murmuring and criticizing him, he offered them a word of explanation: «Does this make you doubt? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?» This is the first proclamation of Christ's transcendence. «I have come from above. You have not understood this while I have been with you, and you are incapable of understanding my return to my divine origin» (John 6:61-62). Christians who have faith know and believe that Christ lives in eternity and that all the inspiration he gives his church is bread that comes down from heaven and nourishes the world. This is the transcendence of Christ.

Christ continues with a second proclamation of his divinity: «It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh counts for nothing» (John 6:63). Christ is the spirit who gives life: «My words are spirit and life». What does Saint John mean when he uses this profound, mystical language? Christ is the One anointed by the Holy Spirit, the One led by the Spirit of God. All his flesh is spiritualized so that, when nailed to the cross, it becomes the source of holiness and grace because he is the one anointed by the Spirit. He is life because he has brought us the life of God. «Those who eat this bread will live because I bring the seeds of eternal life» (John 6:51a).

«No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father» (John 6:44). Dear sisters and brothers, believing in Christ is a great grace. I wouldn't want any of you who are listening or meditating to have doubts about Christ or not believe in Christ. I'd feel very sad because such a person has not accepted the revelation of the Father. And why not? The fault is not in God but in the willingness of the human heart. Unless you truly desire to stop worshiping your idols, the true God cannot come to you. That's why the church tells you, «Be converted! Give up your vanities. Leave the false gods, and you will find the transcendence that will make you happy». No one can come to the Father without having an eager heart that the Father can fill with Christ.

Peter's words are a magnificent proclamation of Christian transcendence: «Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life» (John 6:68). If we understand how this transcendence of Christ reveals to us the absolute God, then we can better explain Joshua's challenge to his people: «You already know the true God, but you also know the false gods. Make up your minds, then, as to which you will worship!» (Josh 24:15).

But what I would like is for all of us to be called into the intimacy of the church. Today the church is fulfilling in this country the function of Joshua, pointing out the only true God and warning against the false gods. So I call on our dear priests and religious; I call on our Catholic institutions and our parish communities and ecclesial base communities; I call on everyone who is part of the church: please, let our voice be heard as a voice of transcendence! May those persons who want to use us by making us into earthly, political kings, as the Jews

⁷ AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO, *Confessions*, I,1: PL 32, 661.

did with Jesus, be confronted with the firm response of Christ, who fled to the mountain proclaiming that God reigns above all politics (John 6:15). Even though the church sheds light on the realities of earth, giving advice to those who belong to organizations and perhaps entering the palaces of politics, what she does should never be confused with partisan politics, for her light always illuminates and supports what is good and denounces and opposes what is evil. (Applause)

For my part, I have tried to make the voice of the church a clear call. Perhaps I haven't succeeded since there's a lot of ill will, ignorance, and idolatry out there, and idolaters don't want to see their idols fall. Nevertheless, my voice cries out once again: what I want to preach is this Christ who says that he seeks the things of earth only to save them. I have to laugh when people say that I'm looking for power. What ability do I have to be a president or a minister? God has called me to be a priest and to be of service from my church and from my priesthood. (Applause)

Yesterday in San Juan Opico, TV channel 13 of Mexico asked me in an interview, «If you or the church were offered the leadership of a revolution, would you accept it?» I replied, «That would be an absurdity. The church is not on earth for that reason. The church doesn't exist to lead an army or carry forward a revolution. The church brings about unity; she remains autonomous between two parties in conflict so that she can tell both of them what is just and what is unjust, and so that she can declare, when there are sins of war, what must not be done even in situations of conflict». The church always seeks to be the voice of Christ, «the bread that comes from heaven to bring life, light, and salvation to the world» (John 6:33).

I beseech all of you dear people who collaborate with the church: let us manifest in the clearest way possible this mind of Christ and this transcendence of the church that Paul VI spoke of: «If the Church proclaimed a liberation different from that of Christ—one that did not free God's children from sin and lead them to heaven and eternal life; if the church became involved with liberation that was only political, social, or economic, then she would lose her original force and would have no right to speak of liberation in God's name» (EN 32). (Applause)

The need for human flesh to be in solidarity with the words of eternal life

So I end with this third reflection of my homily: the need for human flesh to be in solidarity with the words of eternal life. If flesh counts for nothing and only Christ has the words of eternal life, how foolish it would be not to unite ourselves with that eternal life that is so eagerly given to us! We would be unpardonably secularist if we limited ourselves solely to the earth and failed to accept this gift that Christ brings us, this gift that led him to renounce all earthly things only so that he could receive them back and sanctify them.

Today's readings present us with the truly magnificent biblical event I've already mentioned. We see Joshua leading his people as they entered the Promised Land and urging them to remain faithful to God lest they slip into the many dangers there. But even more moving for me is that crisis in the life of Christ, the moment when he was being left alone as the crowd following him slowly drifted away. As his sense of loneliness became more intense, he asked those who remained, «Do you also want to leave?» And the response of Peter is marvelous: «To whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!» (John 6:67-68).

The second reading is where we find the sign of the covenant, the sign of solidarity between divinity and human flesh. Saint Paul tells us today, «Marriage is a great sacrament, but I speak in reference to Christ and his church» (Eph 5:32). A woman and a man, coming from different families and even from distant cities and nations, come to know one another, love one another, and seal a marriage covenant for all their lives. But it is not just the love of that man and that woman. They represent two families or two peoples, but despite their differences they also represent the kind of identification Saint Paul speaks of today: «They are no longer two but are now one flesh» (Eph 5:31). This is the sign that Christ desired to establish on earth so that all of us, when we see people who are married, will think about the alliance of the flesh with the spirit. A man falls in love with a woman and loves her so much that he is capable of giving his life to win her; so also, a woman who loves a man gives herself wholly to him. And the more they love one another and give themselves over to one another, the more they are a sign of the infinite love of God who has sought us out.

What a beautiful saying is contained in today's second reading! «Christ loved the church» (Eph 5:25). Those who do not love the church are not Christians. Christ loved the church and handed himself over for her to cleanse her and bathe her in his own blood, thus making her holy, without blemish, beautiful for all eternity. What would a husband not do to keep his bride always beautiful and young? Well, that is what Christ achieves: a church always beautiful and always young. We add to her adornments with our own virtues and make her more pleasing by our Christian way of life. This is the covenant that Christ asks of us. Christ will never tire of loving. He is faithful even when we betray him, but we must make every effort to be holy and faithful.

The Gospel offers us three marvelous means for living in solidarity with Christ: grace, faith, and the life of the church. By means of grace the Father makes the Son known to us and makes us his children, brothers and sisters of Christ. Faith is given to us only by the Father. Believing in Christ is a work of God. If we have faith, let us thank God; if we don't have faith, let us ask for it, for we cannot attain it if God does not give it to us. And life in the church means forming community. So please allow me, brothers and sisters, to go on a little longer because I want to talk about this church that is taking shape in our archdiocese in communion with the pope and with the universal church.

Life of the church

At this moment of the church's life we have lived our own week in history. We have shared with the pope his concern for China⁸. He wants to establish relations between the Chinese government and the church. China experienced something very tragic in 1949, when the hierarchy became independent of the Holy See and set up an autonomous church. Recently a new bishop was named for Beijing; when he learned that the pope wanted to establish close relations with the separated church of China, this bishop chosen by the Chinese people was opposed to the pope and against full communion with the Holy See. He wants the Holy See to have relations with the government, but he also wants his church to be left independent. Such schism is sad, sisters and brothers. We need to pray hard for these schismatic situations, and we should never think of becoming autonomous ourselves, which would be suicidal. As Christ told us, «when a branch is cut off and loses its connection to the vine, then life no longer runs through it; it withers and dies» (John 15:5-6).

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, «Allocution», 19 August 1979 in *L'Osservatore Romano* (26 August 1979).

For my part, I'd like to take this opportunity to address those who would put me at odds with the Holy See. I want them to know that the archbishop of San Salvador is proud of being in communion with the Holy Father; he respects and loves the successor of Peter. (Applause) I know that I would not be rendering true service to you, dear people of God, if I were to break you away from the unity of the church. Far be such a thing from me! I would prefer to die a thousand times than be a schismatic bishop.

Also, in communion with the hierarchy of Costa Rica, I want to tell you about the magnificent unity of the five bishops there in face of the strike in Puerto Limón. They are proposing some steps to help the community once again find peace. I believe that these steps are quite valid for us as well. We should learn from the bishops of Costa Rica because they are teachers of the church. (Applause)

The steps are the following: «First, a cessation to the violence. Second, the obligation of those who have much to understand the needs of those who have little. Third, the need for those making the demands to view objectively the difficult economic situation being experienced not only by Costa Rica but by the whole world. Fourth, a firm resolve to preserve the democratic spirit of freedom and dignity that are the fundamental values of Costa Rican institutions. And fifth, willingness to listen and to speak with sincerity and understanding so that dialogue will be fruitful»⁹. This voice of the Costa Rican hierarchy can provide much help for our own situation. Let us stress especially the phrase, «the obligation of those who have much to understand the needs of those who have little». Everyone must be realistic, not only those who call strikes and make demands, but also the management side. Management should not declare that the demands are impossible. They should consider the huge amounts they have earned, perhaps not right now but in the past, for these constitute the property of which the pope says, «Property is not an absolute right; there is a social mortgage on all private property»¹⁰. All property is mortgaged for the common good, and if during times of crisis it is necessary to take money from one's own pocket and suffer a loss, then it must be done. Over and above the profits of a factory or a business, there are human beings, and for the church human beings are what is most sacred.

There is also news about our priests in this archdiocesan community that we are building up. Our beloved vicar general, Monsignor Ricardo Urioste, has returned from the United States. That's the reason he was absent these days; his visit to the United States has been a service for our church and for the good of our archdiocese. (Applause) Next Wednesday, God willing, we will ask him to tell us about his trip. You'll be able to hear him on YSAX.

Father Cristóbal Cortés, who functioned as vicar general during his absence, will continue as vicar general. The diocese has a lot of work, and according to canon law there can be two or more vicars general. Accordingly, both Father Cortés and Monsignor Urioste are now vicars general; they have my complete confidence and the confidence of the priests and the people. (Applause)

⁹ «Message of the Bishops Conference of Costa Rica» in *El Diario de Hoy* (23 August 1979).

¹⁰ 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).

We send best wishes for the health of Father Raúl Alberto Flores, the chaplain at La Vega. He is recuperating little by little, but he is still quite sick.

I invite you to offer a prayer on August 31, the anniversary of the death of beloved colleague, Bishop Rafael Valladares, who was an auxiliary in San Salvador.

The sisters have also suffered a loss: Sister Rosita Díaz of Bethania in Santa Tecla has died. We offer our condolences and have already gone there to express them personally.

Life in the communities is also flourishing. In San Antonio Abad they concluded the celebration of the feast of the Assumption. Arcatao celebrated a beautiful patronal feast in honor of Saint Bartholomew yesterday, or rather on August 24.

Once again I would like to complain about the problems being caused by the military checkpoints being set up at the entrances of the towns that are celebrating their traditional feasts. The soldiers should respect the joy of the people! They have even confiscated fireworks, and there can be no feast without fireworks in the town! They decommissioned them! Someone said that when I spoke about how I was stopped and searched myself, I was only seeking my own glory. Sisters and brothers, when I go to these towns, it is not to make bold or appear valiant. I go because my pastoral duty summons me and the community requests my visit. (Applause). I believe it is right for an archbishop to protest when they make him get out of his car. And searching me was something they had never done before. They searched my pockets and all my things as if I were a vile suspect! I am protesting this because the pastor has the right to travel and visit his flock wherever they may, and to celebrate without disturbance the events that the people have so carefully prepared. (Applause).

Yesterday in the community of San Juan Opico there was a beautiful confirmation ceremony, prepared by all the priests of the vicariate. I praise this wonderful gesture of priestly unity.

This afternoon we will celebrate the second anniversary of the murder of Don Felipe Jesús Chacón who, like Saint Bartholomew, was flayed alive for proclaiming the Gospel.

In La Palma there will a meeting of a cooperative nature to give thanks to God. Caritas has complained that the communities of Aguilares, El Salitre, Los Martínez, Arcatao, El Portillo, and El Paraíso are being hindered in their work by official organizations.

Enough news for today, my sisters and brothers. It shows what a lively community we have, thanks be to God. I feel very proud of my archdiocese. I know that wherever I go the people are following Christ with an evangelical spirit. I won't deny that the same thing is happening with our church as happened with Christ: many left him, and others criticized him: «This saying is harsh!» (John 6:60). Still others rejected him and did not believe in him. But there was always a group that told him «To whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life!» (John 6:68) Let it be so. (Applause)