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THE CHURCH AS THE SPOUSE OF CHRIST

Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time¹

12 November 1978

Wisdom 6:13-17

1 Thessalonians 4:12-17

Matthew 25:1-13

Let us imagine, sisters and brothers, that we form part of that intimate circle of our Lord Jesus Christ as he gives this famous sermon called the eschatological discourse. It is found in chapters 24 and 25 of Saint Matthew, almost at the end of that gospel. Jesus has left the temple of Jerusalem, where he had engaged in those fierce arguments that presaged his tragic end, as we saw on previous Sundays. His enemies hate him and envy him intensely; they simply cannot allow him to go on that way. How sad it is when a prophet has already been assigned a destiny of blood! Christ leaves the temple and walks toward the Mount of Olives. Nowadays, from that vantage point in Jerusalem, one does not behold the temple that Jesus Christ could see and that was being marvelously restored by Herod; what one sees now is a deserted esplanade on which are built some Muslim mosques.

At the time, however, Christ sat on the hill with his apostles and told them, «Look, what a marvel that temple is!» To which he added, «But see, no stone will remain upon another stone» (Matt 24:1-2). Here begins the long eschatological discourse in which Christ, like all the prophets, looks toward the future and describes something like a photograph with two perspectives. The near perspective foresees the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in the year 70: the temple will be destroyed, and «no stone will remain upon another stone». The other perspective is more distant: the end of the world. He talks about catastrophes in the cities, violent earthquakes, and wars that will destroy the beautiful buildings, but these are only signs of the final destruction, the time when even the sun and the stars will wobble in their paths, the time when the Son of Man will appear in the majesty of his glory to call out to the dead, «Come to be judged». This is the end of the world, the final catastrophe.

Read the whole of this chapter 24, dear sisters and brothers. For reasons of time the church does not offer the whole chapter to us today, but it would make good meditation material for the base communities this week. At the same time, reflect on the parable contained in that sermon, in which Christ warns the people about the end of the world and the destruction of Jerusalem. The Son of Man will come when people least expect it, and so they must be prepared (Matt 24:42-44). People don't go to sleep when thieves are prowling around because they know a thief will look for a moment of carelessness to break in. Just so will be the coming of the Son of Man, a coming that is then explained in two precious parables. One of them is what we heard in this Sunday's gospel (Matt 25:1-13), and the other will be read next

¹ The recording of this homily is incomplete and it contains interference and interruptions. To make up for these deficiencies, we have relied on the transcription of the first edition. See ROMERO O.A., *Su pensamiento*, Vol. 5, San Salvador [no date] 289-302.

Sunday (Matt 25:14-30), the very last Sunday of the liturgical year. So we have only two weeks left before the end of this liturgical year and the beginning of the new year, when we start preparing for Christmas. Let us observe this ending of the year, therefore, as a warning of the Divine Teacher about our future. Let us not play around with life!

All this we find symbolized in the story of the ten maidens in today's gospel. According to the customs of Christ's time, these maidens were part of the wedding celebration. The marriage itself took place when the bridegroom went to the bride's home, where he received the bride with the authorization of her parents. He then took her to his own home to establish a new household, and all along the way the couple was accompanied by their friends with great merriment. Among them would be the ten young women who are the protagonists of today's parable. Accordingly, I would like to give today's homily the beautiful title that Christ suggests to us, for the kingdom of heaven is like a marriage between Christ and the church. What I will preach on, then, is «The Church as the Spouse of Christ».

This marriage symbolism is used a lot in the Old Testament. Redemption is seen in terms of God's loving concern for humankind: his creating us, coddling us, giving us intelligence and abilities, and leading us through history. The love of God for his chosen people is often compared with a husband's love for his spouse. That's why the same comparison is heard on the lips of Christ since he preached his Gospel while recalling the promises of the Old Testament. Christ went so far as to compare himself to the bridegroom when the Pharisees criticized him and his disciples for not fasting. He told them, «How can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is still with them? This is not a time for fasting but for celebrating» (Matt 9:14-15). The days would come when they would have to weep and fast in announcing his passion. Also, when the authorities asked John the Baptist whether he was the Messiah, he replied, «No, I am nothing more than a friend of the bridegroom. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. I rejoice as the friend of the one who's getting married, but not as the bridegroom» (John 3:28-29). And in the Apocalypse we find that magnificent image: «I saw», says Saint John, «something like a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven, festively adorned as a bride about to be married» (Rev 21:2). The bridegroom always sees his bride as beautiful. On the great day she will present herself modestly dressed in white before God's altar, and she will be radiant with celestial light. This is the image that the Apocalypse offers us: the church as the spouse of the Lamb, the new Jerusalem, the city of God.

When the Second Vatican Council searches for images of the church in the Bible, it makes mention of this comparison of the bridegroom and the bride and writes the following words as a kind of marriage poem: «The church is also described as the spotless spouse of the spotless Lamb. It is she whom Christ "loved and for whom he delivered himself up so that he might sanctify her". It is she whom he unites to himself by an unbreakable covenant, and whom he unceasingly nourishes and cherishes. It is she whom once purified he wills to be cleansed and joined to himself, subject to him in love and fidelity, and whom, finally, he fills with heavenly gifts for all eternity, in order that we may know the love of God and of Christ for us, a love which surpasses all knowledge. While journeying on earth in a foreign land away from the Lord, the church sees herself as an exile. She seeks and is concerned about these things which are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, where the life of the church is hidden with Christ in God until she appears in glory with her Spouse» (LG 48). In this beautiful description of the church, I find three thoughts that correspond precisely to today's three readings. What is matrimony? First, it means covenant; second, it means waiting; and third, it means consummation in a wedding feast.

Marriage means covenant

The first reading is always some echo from the Old Testament that foreshadows the Gospel. Since Christ is going to tell us today that he and the church are like a married couple, the first reading will offer us a passage that says something about marriage. Today the reading from the book of Wisdom tells two things: how God eagerly seeks out humankind and how fortunate are those who open themselves to God's seeking.

All you who have come to the cathedral this morning with a true sense of faith and all those who are attending other churches in search of God—you are precisely the ones described in today's first reading, taken from chapter six of the book of Wisdom. This passage states that every dialogue between God and human beings begins with God's initiative, for «wisdom is radiant and unfading» (Wis 6:12). In return, God hopes for acceptance and openness on the part of human beings. There are some people who close their hearts to God's wisdom.

Since we're speaking of marriage, we might use the comparison of two hearts that meet, become fond of one another, and begin to fall in love. The love of the persons keeps growing after that first encounter, and one day it becomes so strong that it wants to establish itself in an eternal covenant. On that sacred day when the bride and the bridegroom become husband and wife before the altar of God, that first meeting—which was perhaps completely by chance—is transformed into a covenant that will last until death. So also, God is like a lover who falls in love with humanity; he seeks out his beloved and cares for her. Such is the beautiful description we find in the first reading: «Wisdom hastens to make herself known in advance to those who desire her. Those who look for her at dawn will not be disappointed. They will find the love they seek seated near their door. Those who watch for her will soon find themselves clothed by her. She makes her rounds, seeking those worthy of her; she graciously appears to them on the road and meets them with all solicitude» (Wis 6:13-16). What a beautiful description of two lovers! The thought is haunting. Love is given to us by God, and that is why it is sad to see love prostituted. The Bible describes the attraction between man and woman in such divine terms that we should always view it with great respect. This attraction, this obsession, this magnetism between male and female is truly a gift of God. When two persons finally come to believe that they have the strength needed to love one another for the rest of their lives, then they set a seal on the covenant of their love.

Perhaps many of you, like myself, find it difficult to understand how it is that God can fall in love with humanity. Perhaps we men, especially, feel a certain repugnance at imagining ourselves as loved by God, as if we were made feminine by receiving that love. That is nothing to be ashamed of. What is stressed here is neither male nor female. What is stressed is the covenant between eternal love and the humanity created by that love. That is what we have to see. When I finally comprehend that marriage, more than just a bonding of the two sexes, is a covenant between two children of God, then I also understand the meaning of those words in Genesis: «Let us make humans in our image and likeness» (Gen 1:26). A young school girl asked me once, «Is that text referring to the man or the woman?» I told her, «To both, because the man is not complete unless he is conjoined with the other sex and finds his perfection in love». Therefore, a man and a woman are true images of God only when they love one another so profoundly that they can commit themselves to one another for a lifetime. God is love, and men and women are most truly God's images when they love one another and place a seal on their covenant of love.

It is for this reason, sisters and brothers, that the covenant between Christ and the church is the symbol that lies hidden within every marriage. That is why Saint Paul addressed himself to married couples with these words: «Your love is a great mystery, but I say this thinking about Christ and the church» (Eph 5:32). When a woman and a man love one another as purely, as unreservedly, and as blessedly as Christ and the church love one another, then they reflect for all the world to see the indissolubility of the love with which Christ united himself to the church forever. We then have.... They should make the noise somewhere else!² Patience! When the married couple understands that they are a sign of God's love for humanity, then they will understand what it means to belong to the church and, as part of the church, to love dearly and faithfully the church's Divine Spouse, our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the matrimonial covenant possessions are held in common, which is why we have that lovely ceremony—though not obligatory, it expresses much—in which the husband entrusts to the wife the small coins called the «pledge»; they are the sign that all possessions will be held in common between the two of them. In like manner Paul calls the Holy Spirit «the pledge» of the marriage between Christ and his church (2 Cor 1:22) because Christ died for his church, thus sanctifying her and bathing her in the blood of the cross; then by rising, he regained for her all the grace we had lost through sin. All that treasure of redemption he hands over to the church in the Spirit. «Receive the Spirit», he told his disciples as a pledge of that marriage (John 20:22). And as the Council has just told us, it is through this same Spirit that the church finds all the means needed to sanctify humanity.

In another chapter the Council expands further on this idea of Christ's covenant with the church at the time of the Passover: «Christ, having been lifted up from the earth has drawn all to himself. Rising from the dead, he sent his life-giving Spirit upon his disciples, and through the Spirit he established his Body which is the church as the universal sacrament of salvation. Sitting at the right hand of the Father, he is continually active in the world in order to lead people to the church and through her join them to himself so as to make them partakers of his glorious life by nourishing them with his own Body and Blood. ... Already the final age of the world has come upon us, and the renovation of the world is irrevocably decreed and is already anticipated in some kind of a real way, for the church already on this earth is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect» (LG 48). Let us savor the present moment of the church, sisters and brothers. We don't have to wait until the hour of our death to see how much God loves us and how generously he has lavished on us the gifts of redemption. At this very moment every Catholic who experiences the fullness of the church, who is nourished by her word and lives by her hope, and who wholeheartedly believes in eternal life is already united in marriage with Christ, with heaven, with eternal happiness.

The universal restoration was decreed from the day on which Christ died on the cross, thus paying for the sins of all humanity, and then rose with new life. The seed of this new life is already there in the entrails of history, and the church is the depository of that seed. It is the church that proclaims redemption. As the Council has just told us, Christ, seated at the right hand of the Father and living forever, is acting in the world by means of the church (LG 48). The church, as the spouse of Christ, acts as the earthly administrator of the eternal goods of redemption. The church on earth does not save only those who are within her bosom. Living within the church as her Spouse and cherishing the love of his bride, Christ acts through her

² On the tape recording can be heard the noise of sirens.

fidelity and submission to him and becomes the Redeemer of all humanity today, in 1978, as he has been for twenty centuries now. Faithfully wedded to his church, Christ has given the fruits of redemption as his pledge, so that she will administer them in her word, in her sacraments, in her forgiveness, in her hope, and in her preaching of liberation from every form of slavery. I urge you, dear sisters and brothers, to be alive to this present reality so that we may truly experience the joy of possessing a church in whose bosom Christ is acting. For Christ is alive, and Christ will die no more! He is the Spouse who loves this church, the beloved whom he wed twenty centuries ago.

Marriage means waiting

My second idea, then, is this: marriage means waiting, especially when one of the spouses has been provisionally widowed. That's why the Council tells us that, even though the church journeys on earth as if in exile, she still savors the things of heaven, where her Spouse awaits her (LG 6). A widow can understand this, and so can the wife who weeps for her exiled husband—«When will they let him return to the country?» This is the love of extended arms.

Accordingly, the Council, mindful of the inspiration that God is continually giving his spouse, the church on earth, utters a beautiful phrase: «The Spirit and the bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, "Come!"» (LG4). In olden days church ceremonies concluded with these same words: «*Maranatha!* Come! We are waiting!» Even today we use those words at the moment of consecration: when I lift up the host and say to you, «This is the mystery of our faith», you answer with the voice of the church: «We announce your death! We proclaim your resurrection! Come, Lord Jesus!» How beautiful it is when such a cry comes forth from a people who are experiencing the pangs of birth and yet have placed all their hope in the Lord Jesus. They are suffering because of the current realities of our national history, which are part of the natural world groaning under sin, under repression, under slavery, under pain, under injustice; and yet they are crying out for the new heaven and new earth that the Lord Jesus will give us!

This is the time in which we have to live, dear sisters and brothers. We are not yet in heaven. It is true that as church we have the guarantee that Christ lives in our midst, but he is a hidden Christ, a Christ whom we experience near to us in the Eucharist but who still makes us exclaim, «Come, Lord, let yourself be seen!» This community is the bride in love, the beloved who from her exile calls out for a kiss, for an embrace, and longs to live forever united with him.

This is a precious moment, sisters and brothers, but how long will it last? It is precisely here that the parable of the maidens finds its place (Matt 25:1-13). According to the customs of Israel, as I told you before, the bridegroom used to go, along with his friends, to find his bride in her parents' home and make her his wife. The wedding feast would last all night, and naturally it was not characterized by punctuality. Rather, the whole night was given over to celebration, and that's why the ten maidens who were supposed to accompany the bridegroom fell asleep. But only five of them were prepared; they had a reserve of oil for their lamps. At midnight, when much of the oil in the lamps had been used up, a joyous cry was heard in the distance: «The bridegroom is coming. Let's go and meet him!» The maidens who had extra oil refilled their lamps and so could accompany the bridegroom, but those who had used up all their oil asked the others, «Lend us some oil because we have none». The others replied, «There may not be enough for both you and us. You'd better go to the store and buy some». This was lack of foresight on the part of the maidens, and that's what Christ's eschatological discourse is trying

to tell us: «Be prepared for at the hour you least expect the Bridegroom will come for his bride, the church, who is in exile».

In the theology of the early Christians that «hour» was known by the very symbolic Greek term, *parousia*. In ancient times the Greek word was used to designate either the appearance of an invisible god or the arrival of an emperor or a governor in a city where a great reception was prepared for him. That term, *parousia*, was also used in the Bible to refer to the second coming of the Messiah to judge all of history. The *parousia*, therefore, is the moment when Christ will come to gather up our life at the hour of our death; it is the encounter which will culminate all that we have been hoping for in life. Blessed are we if we are prepared with our lamps of faith burning brightly with the oil of charity and good works. Woe to us if at the *parousia* Christ finds us with our lamps extinguished for lack of oil, with our souls in sin and our lives not ready.

My main objective in today's homily is to call us to live in constant expectation. The Council describes this attitude for us marvelously when it says, «While we are in the body, we are exiled from the Lord but have the first-fruits of the Spirit; we groan within ourselves, and we desire to be with Christ. By charity we are urged to live more for him, who died for us and rose again. We strive, therefore, to please God in all things, and we put on the armor of God so that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil and resist in the evil day. Since, however, we know neither the day nor the hour, on our Lord's advice we must be constantly vigilant so that, having finished the course of our earthly life, we may merit to enter into the marriage feast with him and be numbered among the blessed and so that we will not be ordered to go into eternal fire like the wicked and slothful servant, into the exterior darkness where "there will be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth"» (LG 48). These last words, taken from Matthew's gospel (Matt 25:30), are cited by the Council to warn us that the most important message for the church to communicate to humankind is this one: we are the bride in exile, and we are going forth to meet the Bridegroom, so let us be prepared lest, like the imprudent maidens, we be shut out of the wedding feast and told, «I do not know you» (Matt 25:12).

It is here, sisters and brothers, that I want to reaffirm the very difficult but necessary mission the church has: she must preach to today's world about its temporal duties. The Council says that the church is in the world in order to serve the world, and her greatest service is precisely that of encouraging «Christians, who are at once citizens of the temporal city and of the eternal city, to fulfill faithfully their temporal obligations, guided always by the Gospel spirit» (GS 43). How wonderfully the Council describes each one of us, sisters and brothers! We are «citizens of the temporal city», Salvadorans with earthly commitments, running farms or estates or managing capital or labor. We are citizens of this earth: lawyers, professionals, politicians, market vendors, people who earn their living by carrying out earthly tasks. It is to us as citizens of this earth that the church speaks. But at the same time we are also citizens of «the eternal city». We live in exile, but we are traveling toward our homeland. But take note, the Council says that those persons are mistaken who say that the church should stick to the sacristy and not make claims about justice or human rights. The Council states clearly, «Those Christians are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more obliged than ever to measure up to these duties, each according to his or her proper vocation» (GS 43). The Council is talking about those people who complain, «The bishop is just preaching politics», because he's talking about

human rights, because he's denouncing injustices, because he's telling people about their political duties and their rights of free association. Sisters and brothers, all I am saying is that as citizens of heaven we have consciences and we have to account for them before God. We would be committing a great wrong if we were to say that we can live as we like in the earthly city because we're awaiting the future heavenly city. That would be doing just what communism says we do when it calls religion «the opium of the people».

Therefore, says the Council, «They are also equally mistaken who think that they can totally commit themselves to temporal matters, in the belief that these concerns are completely distinct from their religious obligations. In so doing, they reduce religion to worship and the fulfillment of certain moral obligations» (GS 43) A great many people have come to experience what the Council describes as a «split between the faith people profess and the daily lives they lead», and this split, the Council says, «deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age» (GS 43). There are people for whom religion consists in nothing more than a few acts of worship, such as a *Te Deum* for a fifteenth birthday or a wedding celebration in which matrimony is seen not in terms of Christ's love for the church but simply as a social transaction—more attention is paid to asking whether it was «better» than another marriage on which thousands were spent. All these acts of worship are for the sake of human vanity, but later, after performing the religious acts, they go on to commit injustices, violating the right of workers to organize and to form unions and failing to pay their harvesters decently. Ah, but they're very religious because they go to Mass every Sunday! Those acts of worship are useless if they're divorced from their daily lives. The church is obliged to preach to people that even in their temporal affairs they should be thinking about the accounting they must render to God.

There are some words of the Council that I would like you to engrave deeply in your hearts: «Those Christians who neglect their temporal obligations and their duties toward their neighbors are also neglecting their duties toward God and therefore are jeopardizing their eternal salvation» (GS 43). What does this mean, sisters and brothers? It's a shame that our religion has sometimes betrayed the Gospel in order to please people in high positions. By telling them that those acts of worship are sufficient for salvation, we have exposed them to being forever lost! We are now returning to an authentic religion of the Gospel, one in which Christ tells us that «the kingdom of heaven will be like ten maidens who went forth to meet the bridegroom» (Matt 25:1). Woe to those who do not take advantage of these hours of their lives to fill up their lamps with good works so that they may go forth to meet the Lord with charity and practical love! Speaking of certain virgins, Saint Bernard once said they were «pure as angels but arrogant as devils»³. The Christian virtues must be integrated with one another. Christ came to preach an integral redemption. He wants not appearances but sincerity.

Also, dear sisters and brothers, if marriage means waiting, we should not forget that, as the Council says, the church is still in this temporal phase (LG 48). In view of this, I would like to tell those of you who are married that your marriage is also in a phase of expectation. A marriage is never a simple fact, for every day there is the need to forgive one another, help one another, and sanctify one another. The husband who wants to see his wife as a perfect angel is quite mistaken, as is the wife who wants to see her husband as an already heavenly being. They are both creatures of flesh and bone, heirs of the legacies and defects of generations, and they

³ The expression is not from Saint Bernard but is rather attributed to the archbishop of Paris, Hardouin de Beaumont de Peréfix, after he visited the monastery of Port-Royal on 21 August 1664 in an attempt to get the nuns there to sign an anti-Jansenist statement. See DE MONTHERLANT H., *Port-Royal*, Gallimard, Paris 1945, 112, and SAINTE-BEUVE C., «La Pléiade» in *Port-Royal*, Gallimard, Paris 1954, vol. II, 686.

have to learn to put up with many things in one another. The church must also ask her Divine Spouse to tolerate many things in her for she still lives in this temporal phase in which her sacraments, institutions, hierarchy, priests and other elements are afflicted with many imperfections; yet, as the Council tells us, «already on this earth she is signed with a sanctity which is real although imperfect» (LG 48), and because of her good will she moves forward toward that time of perfection. We must remember this so as not to demand of the church on earth what the church will have only when she is perfectly consummated.

Life of the church

So this is my third thought, sisters and brothers: the life of the church. But before looking at this perfectly consummated church—this church that the Apocalypse describes for us as «the new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride to be given to her husband» (Rev 21:2)—let us not forget that we still have not reached that church. Rather, it is precisely in this church of earth where I narrate every Sunday our weekly history. Please don't be upset by this, sisters and brothers, because if we forget that, during this week of November 1979, the church is still on a journey, then we strip the flesh off the great mystery of this church as the spouse who journeys toward the definitive encounter, toward the consummation of her heavenly life. So what do we find in our church this week?

Allow me, sisters and brothers, to rejoice in telling you that my greatest satisfaction this week has been to feel myself, along with the whole archdiocese, in communion with the pope. For those who want to view my pastoral work and the pastoral policy of the archdiocese as divorced from the true doctrine and attitude of the church, I want to let you know that Pope John Paul II has expressed himself in the following way to the archbishop of this archdiocese⁴:

«Vatican City, 30 October. Your Excellency: On the occasion of the election of the supreme pontiff, his Holiness John Paul II wants to express to you his cordial greeting in the name of all the members of that ecclesial community. I have the pleasure of communicating to you that the Holy Father has received with profound satisfaction the exquisite proof of filial devotion that was especially manifested in your prayers for the intentions of the new pastor of the universal church. Assuring you that the Holy Father is most grateful to you, I am pleased to extend his paternal blessing to every member of that portion of Christ's flock. Devotedly yours in the Lord, Cardinal Villot, Secretary of State».

The pope, who wrote to us through his secretary, will today take possession of the cathedral of Rome, which is Saint John Lateran. Also, this week the pope received the priests and religious of his diocese. He exhorted the clergy to carry out their priestly duties faithfully, especially celibacy as a clear expression of their mission as priests⁵. He also told the religious that their vocation signifies to people their exclusive love for God⁶. Furthermore, he stated that if he is pastor of the universal church, it is only because he is bishop of Rome⁷. That is the meaning of the ceremony this Sunday. In taking possession of the Cathedral of Saint John Lateran, which is the cathedral of Rome, the pope is saying that he is the authentic successor of

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Clergy of Rome», 9 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (19 November 1978).

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Religious Sisters of Rome», 10 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (19 November 1978).

⁷ Ibid.

Peter to the See of Rome, and by virtue of that he is pastor of the whole universal church. In this way the pope also explained why the tradition of having an Italian pope has been broken. As bishop of Rome, he would more properly be an Italian, but as pastor of the world, the bishop of Rome need not be Italian because his relations are with the whole world. On this day, then, let us rejoice with the bishop of Rome who is at the same time our universal pastor.

This has also been a week of great joy for our priests. I've already mentioned the twenty-five years of pastoral service of Father Teodoro Alvarenga in the parish of Santo Tomás. I personally witnessed how grateful people are when they see their priest as one consecrated by God to be a servant of the community. There was also much joy in the heartwarming celebration we had with the priests who have been ordained twenty-five years and also with Father Platero, who was commemorating fifty years of religious life. That Eucharist was attended by some men who are no longer exercising priestly ministry; as persons reduced to the lay state, they still manifest their fraternal esteem of the priesthood, and in their lives they continue to respect the priestly character which will always remain in them. I am delighted because many of our brothers who were priests and who no longer exercise ministry do not feel separated from us. Rather, the indelible character which has marked them for all eternity makes them feel close to the life of the church.

This past week the confederation of religious elected their new board. We wish them much success because the objective of this organization of religious is to reaffirm their consecration to God, which, as the pope said, is the expression of exclusive love for God. I experienced very profound joy also in sharing, though just for a short while, in the spiritual retreat of thirty priests. The retreat was directed by Father Jesús Delgado and had as its theme priestly identity. The dialogue with the bishop was very frank, and I am grateful for the sense of solidarity shown by almost all the priests making the retreat.

After that, sisters and brothers, we traveled around some of the communities that make up our archdiocesan community. Yesterday the city of San Martín celebrated their patron, and the program included an outstanding presentation by a youth group. We also send greetings in advance to Candelaria in Cuscatlán, where the patronal feast Dulce Nombre de María will be celebrated on November 15.

A vote of thanks goes out to the parish of La Palma, whose pastor, our dear Father Vito Guarato, came to visit me and to express, in the name of his parish and his Franciscan provincial, their profound solidarity with our archdiocesan ministry. He said that there in his parish he asks those who are sick to pray for the archbishop and the archdiocese. What a beautiful treasure those prayers are! May God bless you!

Also, the parish bulletin of La Palma contains a warning that should not be missed. It refers to the deception of some Protestants who go about, for example, on All Souls' Day preaching against the Catholic custom of praying for the dead. Or they go about selling Protestant books in the name of the archbishop!

Tomorrow morning at nine o'clock in the village of San Antonio Manaquil, which is in San José de las Flores, Chalatenango, there will be a celebration of the patronal feast. In Arcatao the sisters who direct the pastoral ministry of that community have issued a warning call regarding the false denunciations sometimes made by enemies of the church as a way of

causing confusion about what the church says. Be very careful because such denunciations need to come to us well documented so that we can make mention of them.

The lay commission for reflection has been instructed by the archbishop to convolve a monthly meeting of four lay representatives from each vicariate. The first meeting will be next Sunday the nineteenth in the rectory of the parish of San José de la Montaña. I therefore urge all the vicariates to send their four representatives; there should be forty in all since there are ten vicariates in the archdiocese.

Our community also deplores the executive power's decision this week to change the statutes of Caritas of El Salvador without the authorization of the archbishop, as is required by the same statutes. This violates a right of the archbishop. You can read in *Orientación* the letter we addressed to the president⁸. The response given by the Minister of the Interior⁹ only aggravates this offense because he is only a civil authority and yet attempts to explain the offense by offering an arbitrary interpretation of the canon laws. These laws should be respected by the authorities since the church has legal status and is governed by her own laws.

I also regret that in *El Diario de Hoy* a phantom organization has made use of a sophistic argument—which, as you know, is false reasoning—in trying to find some connection between an editorial in *Orientación* and a pronouncement of the rebel group, the FPL¹⁰. The sophistry consists in confusing people by taking different dates, 1972 and 1978, and making them simultaneous. The author of the statement may be of a different opinion, but the newspaper wants to make it appear that the individual is a member either of the church or of the FPL. The sophistry also involves a confusion of places—as if Santa Ana were part of the Archdiocese of San Salvador—and also a confusion of motives: *Orientación* is dealing with one thing, and the pronouncement is treating another matter altogether. *Orientación* does not engage in propaganda, nor is it in league with the FPL. Rather, as our pastoral letter says, it simply defends the just claims of the workers. That's why I tell you, sisters and brothers, that we must learn to read the media with a critical eye because otherwise sophistry is a tool that will deceive us. In the next edition of *Orientación* you'll be able to find an explanation of what I've summed up here briefly¹¹.

Events of the week

Our community must also grieve this week because it lives on this earth which has seen a week of much violence. On Saturday the fourth Antonio Crespín Velázquez was violently removed from his house and taken in handcuffs to an unknown destination.

On Monday the sixth the FPL murdered the industrialist Roberto Saade¹² and his companion Santos Elpidio in order to avenge the killing of Guillermo Rivas. On the same day two workers, Oscar Monterrosa and Felipe Antonio Orellana, were violently taken from their homes by eighteen men disguised as *campesinos*, but wearing wigs and carrying automatic weapons. Their whereabouts is unknown.

⁸ *Orientación* (12 November 1978).

⁹ *Orientación* (19 November 1978).

¹⁰ «Strange Coincidence», statement of the Legionnaires of the Catholic Faith in *El Diario de Hoy* (10 November 1978).

¹¹ «Editorial» in *Orientación* (19 November 1978).

¹² Director and General Manager of INCA.

This past Tuesday another armed movement, the ERP, placed forty explosive charges in different parts of the country. Most of them exploded, causing considerable material damage. That same Tuesday Santos Velázquez Nuñez, a member of the Union of Slum Dwellers, was killed. His death was attributed to the security forces.

On Wednesday the eighth Doctor Ricardo Ávila Moreira, the first magistrate of the First Penal Court, was attacked and wounded. This attack was also attributed to the FPL. That same Wednesday an officer of the National Police, Rodolfo Alvarado Montes, died; he had been attacked on October 30 by supposed terrorists. On Thursday the ninth Mr. Pedro Juan Cortés Ventura was killed; he was the first justice of the peace of Tecoluca and a member of ORDEN and the PCN. No organization has assumed responsibility for this murder.

Also this week, the newspapers published several cases of disappeared persons, although in some cases it is not clear whether they are kidnappings or simply people who have fled. One of them was Francisco Baltasar Campos, who disappeared on October 25; people say they saw him in the prisons of the National Police, but the police deny that they have him in custody. Other names of disappeared persons are also mentioned: Gilberto Antonio Rivera, on September 6; José Adán Vázquez, on November 2; Santos Ángel Vázquez Rodríguez, who disappeared on October 30—Legal Aid asserts that he was arrested; and Rigoberto Esquivel Ponce, an elderly man of 75 who disappeared at the end of October.

This same week, on the sixth, there was a commemoration of the first anniversary of the arrest of Professor Efraín Arévalo Ibarra, a member of the executive council of ANDES. He was arrested by the National Police, but they then denied that they had him in custody. That day was also the first anniversary of the murder of the industrialist Raúl Molina Cañas.

I have also been asked by Julio Alberto Reynosa Vallejos, of the parish of Ataco, to denounce the torture to which he was subjected before escaping from the country¹³.

Also, the various labor conflicts do not seem to be moving toward resolution. There is fear of union organization in ADOC and Sacos Sintéticos, and possible leaders are being fired. The strike called this week by the workers of Sacos Cuscatlán is still in progress. We were informed that there is hope for dialogue, and we're hopeful that they'll soon reach an agreement. There is also good news from the workers of Fantasías y Novedades, who report that the Ministry of Labor acknowledged that there have been serious deficiencies in management-labor relations. Let us hope that this government intervention results in a just accord.

As you see, dear sisters and brothers, this tragic week has very diverse origins. I want to remind you—which the phantasm legionaries will not do—that in the same edition of *Orientación* that gave rise to their sophism¹⁴ we also published the pastoral letter which states clearly the posture of the archdiocese with regard to violence and the right to organize. I only want to remind you that if the church distinguishes different types of violence—and all the victims of violence I've mentioned today have different origins—I nevertheless state in the pastoral letter:

¹³ «Testimony of a Tortured Man» in *Orientación* (19 November 1978).

¹⁴ *Orientación* (10 September 1978).

We cannot place our confidence in violent methods if we are truly Christians or even decent persons. We proclaim the supremacy of our faith in peace, and we call upon everyone to make every effort to bring about peace. But the peace in which we believe is the fruit of justice. A simple analysis of our social structures shows—and history confirms—that violent conflicts will not disappear until their deepest roots disappear. Consequently, as long as the causes of our present misery persist, and as long as the most powerful minorities maintain their intransigence and refuse to tolerate even the smallest social changes, the explosive situation will grow worse. Moreover, if they decide to keep using repressive violence, then unfortunately the conflict will only grow worse, and the recourse to force in legitimate self-defense will become justifiable not only theoretically but actually. That is why we believe that our most urgent task is the construction of social justice¹⁵.

Marriage is consummation in a wedding feast

Finally, sisters and brothers, I offer the third point of my homily, which will lead us to the altar. This marriage that means encounter and covenant and waiting is moving toward consummation; it is moving toward that heavenly church where justice will reign, where we'll no longer shed tears week after week because of the pain of so many assaults, where new heavens and a new earth will sing forth the blessed marriage of God with humankind, just as God first dreamed.

For this reason I want to conclude with a very beautiful thought of the Council when it refers to the Virgin Mary being taken body and soul into heaven. The Council says that she, in her heavenly glory there, is the principle and the model of the church that will be consummated in the future. Meanwhile, though, she is the bright star whose hope-inspiring consolation accompanies the people of God who are still on their earthly pilgrimage. I conclude with this remembrance of the Virgin because our hearts are deeply moved on this twelfth of November, the day when the people in San Miguel are beginning their novena in honor of Our Lady of Peace. Let us ask in the name of the whole archdiocese that the Virgin make this mission of the spousal church better understood. Recognizing her as the mother of the church, who already enjoys the happiness of the consummated church, let us ask that she help us experience the hopefulness and openness of heart that we need to receive the message that Christ brings to humankind and to be prepared for the encounter with the Lord, just as the prudent maidens were. Let it be so. [Applause]

¹⁵ *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978) 49-50.