

95

SOWING THE WORD OF THE KINGDOM

Fifteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

16 July 1978

Isaiah 55:10-11

Romans 8:18-23

Matthew 13:1-23

The very gospel we just heard, dear sisters and brothers, provides us with a picturesque setting for our homily. I have in my mind the multitude here in the cathedral and the groups gathered around their radios listening to YSAX, and I also can see that anonymous multitude listening in remote villages, some perhaps clandestinely, wondering what the archbishop is going to say. This is like the multitude that followed Christ. I want you all to feel that our Lord, the Divine Teacher, is sitting here in the crowd with you. Imagine him there in that rural setting on the shore of the lake, and you're there also, listening to him as he preaches from the boat.

How simple Jesus was! What natural scenes he liked to use for his preaching! And how wonderful it is to hear that our own Salvadoran countryside—where rains have fallen in these days, thank God—is offering us harvests of maize and other crops. As he takes in this whole panorama, the Lord is inspired to tell us one of his most beautiful parables: the parable of the sower!

So I would like to call this homily, «Sowing the Word of the Kingdom», and I want to present three ideas: first, the word of the kingdom is the seed; second, the proclamation of this word is the sowing called «evangelization»; and third, the harvesting of this crop is the integral salvation of humankind and the world.

Events of the church

But before developing these thoughts, I want to call your attention with a few humble words to our acts of filial devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Today, July 16, our people experience Mary under this title of Carmel as the great popular missionary. I feel great solidarity with the multitudes of pilgrims who come from all the villages carrying banners of the Virgin to celebrate this feast of Carmel. From this cathedral I want to express my solidarity with these demonstrations of affection in honor of Our Lady.

Yesterday the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Joseph consecrated two new religious sisters to the Virgin. The superior general said to me, «How the Lord is blessing us with so many vocations!» And truly, the postulants and the novices who have yielded this fruit of two professed sisters make us hopeful for this congregation that is a genuine product of El Salvador. On this day also the Carmelites of Saint Theresa are celebrating the anniversary of the consecration of their lovely chapel in the Divina Providencia Hospital. Two of the sisters there are celebrating today twenty-five years of consecrated life. I also want to thank the

Carmelite Fathers for their work in the parish of El Carmen in the Colonia Roma; they are providing a very valuable collaboration. I'm grateful also to the other Carmelites of the archdiocese: the Carmelite sisters in the Colegio Santa Teresa de La Gruta; the Carmelite communities directly involved in development projects, such as those in the Colonia Utila in Santa Tecla and the Santa Teresita Home in Apulo; and the Carmelites ministering in parishes such as Guazapa and Ciudad Barrios and in other directly pastoral labors. Finally, I greet all those parishes, villages, and chapels that are today celebrating their patronal feast in honor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Most noteworthy of all is the parish of Our Lady of Mercy here in San Salvador, where an image of the Virgin of Mount Carmel is venerated; this image was crowned by the pope's authority and is a treasure of the people's devotion to Our Lady of Mount Carmel. This same devotion animates all those confraternities that have arisen in so many places during the course of centuries. Let us unite our reflection, then, with this loving devotion that our people, our priests, and our religious have to Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

The boat from which Christ speaks to the people of all ages is this same church, and so the church's activities must provide the backdrop for this homily. This week the bishops of San Salvador met together as an episcopal conference to deal with matters of a general nature, such as the seminary and preparations for the meeting in Puebla. We also did an in-depth study of the social, political, and economic reality of our country. In light of these realities that are of interest to all of you, dear sisters and brothers, I want to say something to those of you who are so scandalized by the lack of unity among the bishops. Please learn how to pardon the human sins of the church. Love the church not because of the good example of her priests but because of her realization that she must keep maturing more and more. As Christ once said in the gospels when speaking of the priests of his time, «Do what they tell you, but don't do what they do» (Matt 23:3). If we should unfortunately give you bad example, don't use our bad example as a pretext for saying that the whole world is becoming Protestant. Today's parable is going to tell you how to respond to such hesitant faith. Let us overlook human deficiencies, for which God will ask each of us to render an account. But let us try to see our hierarchy, despite their defects, as the pastors who are responsible for this flock which is their church. Let us pray hard for them. Instead of letting our faith grow dim, let us take an interest in these concerns of the church, such as the seminary, the evangelization that will be studied in Puebla, and the difficulty the church has in shedding light on the realities of our earth. These things are of interest to us, so let us mature in our faith, sisters and brothers. I beg you to soar to those heights where Christ is the true bishop of our souls so that we who are bishops, priests, religious, and faithful may contemplate him and become ever more truly his humble followers and preachers.

On this same theme of the church, I also rejoice with the community of Tepecoyo, where last Sunday we blessed an attractive church and appreciated the pastoral ministry of the Sisters of Charity. It seemed as though all the sisters from the houses in El Salvador were present there. I was happy to be able to use that homily to thank the Sisters of Charity for the work they're doing there and to encourage them to continue in the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul.

I also had the opportunity to visit the community of Cojutepeque, where I was amazed at how advanced the construction of the new Calvary Church is. I traveled there to look for a house for a social project in that city, and thanks to God and the generosity of a kind woman I think this project will become a reality.

Our newspapers this week published the statement of the Jesuit fathers commenting on the search of their house that I referred to last Sunday. I liked certain phrases in their declaration, such as these: «After the search the security forces attempted to justify their action by saying, "Please pardon what the country is currently going through"». The Jesuits comment, «What explains actions such as this is precisely the situation of the country [which apparently discomfited the police who raided the Jesuits]¹. This situation afflicts people at every level but most especially the *campesinos* and the oppressed classes. Besides the ominously defective structures in the country, we see organized campaigns of insults and calumnies. [It is disgusting to think that the government can tolerate these campaigns that seem more like sewers for the discharge of resentments—and this in the name of the Law of Public Order.] We bear witness to the human blindness of a few individuals and the irrational violence they pour out on the humble and especially on those who truly want to serve the people, whether priests or religious, *campesinos* or intellectuals. This situation is fomenting and amplifying a climate of anguish and collective panic. Today fear grips our country in every sphere»², and it goes on. If you haven't read it, I recommend that you take a look at this courageous and very just statement. Other elements of the church have expressed their solidarity with it. It was an injustice to have carried out the search on the suspicion that these priests who serve the faith and work for justice among our people were storing arms. I'll mention other matters later, dear sisters and brothers, as the homily gives me opportunity.

The word of the kingdom is a seed

As I told you, my first thought is to consider the word of God as a seed. We should not allow that expression we hear every Sunday here at Mass, «word of God», to become something routine. I'm happy to have the chance today, inspired by the beautiful parable of Christ, to explain a little of the theology of the word of God.

In today's first reading, Isaiah compares the word of God to the rain (Isa 55:10). Last night as I reflected on this point, I thought: how beautiful is Isaiah's language that speaks of a soft rain falling and moistening the earth! That's what the word of God is like, says the prophet; it allows seeds to sprout. But the gospel parable knows that the rain is useless if there is no seed planted in the earth. Two things, no, three things are necessary: rain, seed, and earth. Otherwise there is neither sprouting nor harvest. But let us focus on the main thing, the seed.

When Paul VI said that there was a need to renew the church and that this was the goal of the Second Vatican Council, he made it very clear that renewal doesn't mean yielding to the sometimes unchristian ways of the modern world. Renewal means making the church coherent with the seed that was planted. A tree, however much it grows, remains coherent with its seed. What matters, then, is realizing that God's word is a seed and that it cannot be altered. We might like a teaching that is more in keeping with our interests; we might like preaching that isn't so bothersome, that doesn't cause conflicts. But when Christ planted the seed, he had conflicts because that seed is the word of the Just and the Holy One, the One who knows what he wants in creating humanity and nature, and so it crashes against sin and against those who don't want to let the seed grow.

¹ Bracketed texts are comments Romero inserted into the text he was reading.

² «Statement of the Jesuits of El Salvador» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (12 July 1978).

Already in the Old Testament, you read in the book of Genesis, «God said...» This is the word, but not a false word like so many words spoken today. It is rather a word of power; it is a word that identifies speech, will, and action. When «Let there be light» was spoken, there was light (Gen 1:3).

That is the meaning of «word» in the Bible, so much so that when there is talk of naming someone in the Bible—«You will call him...» (Matt 1:23)—it is not an empty name such as we give: John, Frederick, or whatever. Rather, the name always means something that will express the vocation of that person.

During the Exodus the same Word of God that created the world was now guiding the steps of Moses and assuming another perspective: the Word of God has made creation, but it also works salvation. This is important, sisters and brothers, for the salvation that Christ brought to the world was already announced by God, and his redeeming Word is in the same line as the Word that creates. Creation and redemption are both the work of the Word of God. We cannot want creation; we cannot want fields, cattle, and ranches while prescinding from Christ's redemption. That would be utopian desire, an impossibility. The God who created the cattle, the God who created the ranches and the estates is the God who in Christ demands justice; he is the God who redeems; he is the God who wants greater justice among human beings; he is the God who punishes Pharaoh in order to free the oppressed Israelites.

This is the Word of God that is constantly creating and redeeming, that is constantly forging history and in history working salvation. How consoling it is that the God to whom I pray «Our Father...» (Matt 6:9) is not a God disconnected from my hunger, from my reality, from my creation. He is a God concerned about my body, about my food; he is a God who redeems me spiritually, but he is also a God who redeems me bodily and socially. He is creating our history because the God of El Salvador's history is the God of the church. When the church speaks to the history of El Salvador, she is not meddling in politics but reminding us that the God of our history is the God who speaks within his church and makes demands of politics, sociology, and the natural realities of El Salvador, requiring that they live in conformity to his word, which has created those realities for the happiness of all and not for class struggle or selfish striving.

The word of God appears above all when the prophets speak forcefully to the kings or to the people, declaring, «Thus says the Lord» (Amos 1:3). That is when the word of God becomes demand, becomes denunciation, becomes praise of virtues. The prophet's vocation is to communicate the divine will, and that is the prophetic mission that Christ has entrusted to his church. That is why the church, from the cathedral pulpit and from all her pulpits, must proclaim, «Thus says the Lord». The people must obey not because the archbishop says so but because the archbishop is a humble messenger of what the Lord says.

When we come to the New Testament, the word of God takes on even a greater theological dimension. On the lips of Christ the word of God reaches unfathomed depths: it is the Good News, the Gospel, the news of salvation (Mark 1:15). The kingdom of God has arrived, and Christ in his own person not only speaks but is the Word of God: «The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us» (John 1:14). In the New Testament the Word of God is not just a power that creates, preserves, and guides the world; the Word of God is God made human, God who teaches. That is why I said earlier to you, «What a picturesque setting we have for our homily today: Jesus there on the lakeside getting into a boat and teaching the

multitude!» (Matt 13:1-2). It is God who is speaking with his Aramaic language in order to reach those Aramaic speakers listening to him. And on Pentecost he spoke many different languages (Acts 2:6), and now he speaks in Spanish, for through his priests God continues to speak in this church.

Since Christ is the Word of God, Saint Paul is able to coin a very original phrase. He says that «Christ is the Yes and the Amen of the promises» (2 Cor 1:20). In other words, regarding everything that God promised in the Old Testament Christ says «Yes, it is the truth. I am that person made man». The word «amen» means «Let it be so». It means the consummation of what God has said. It is an act of faith. It means believing that everything that God has promised regarding salvation and happiness has become incarnate in Christ: «I am the Amen, the Yes of God's promises. I am the power that can save the world, the Savior of the world. I am the Light; whoever follows me will not walk in darkness. I am the Truth, and apart from me there is no truth. All those who oppose me or cast me aside remain in untruth. I am the Light, I am the Truth, I am the Way, I am God in the midst of you, I am the saving power. Blessed are those who embrace me with faith, who love me and follow me» (John 8:12; 14:6).

How wonderful it is to be Christian! Truly, it means embracing the Word of God incarnate, making ours the power of salvation, keeping hope alive when everything seems lost! That is the reason, sisters and brothers, for my work here in the cathedral and my episcopal ministry. My greatest satisfaction and joy is when I hear people say (as I've heard this week in different demonstrations) that we transmit hope to them and strengthen their faith. They appreciate it when we tell them that, even when they have no political options or don't feel called to battle in those fields, they still can work for a better world because they nourish in their hearts this faith and this hope in Christ. And if out of love of Christ and commitment to this Christian faith they feel called to a political vocation, then they have a the duty to go to work politically, but always under the inspiration of this Amen, of this Yes, of this Way that offers salvation to our people, for otherwise there can be no salvation.

This Christ, the saving power of God, became incarnate, died on the cross, and was raised up, never to die again. He has left an institution in this world that is called the church. Sisters and brothers, let us not tarnish this figure of the church that is carrying out the same mission as Jesus Christ. All the power of God incarnate in Christ has been given to this church. «Go and preach to the whole world. Whoever believes will be saved, and whoever does not believe will be condemned» (Mark 16:15-16). When the apostles wrote and preached, they knew that they were nothing more than humble followers inspired by that revelation that had come to save the world.

So the Bible preserves in its pages the word of God, but the Bible alone is not enough. The church must take the word of the Bible and make it a living word. It's not a matter of literally repeating psalms and parables but of applying them to the concrete life of the particular time when that word of God is being preached. The Bible is like the fountain that conserves the revelation of God's word, but what use is the fountain, as crystal clear as it may be, if we don't fill our jugs from it and apply its waters to the needs of our homes? A Bible that is read only so that we can strictly follow the traditions and custom of the times when those pages were written is a dead Bible. That's called biblicism; it's not what we mean by the revelation of God.

Consequently, when our Protestant sisters and brothers criticize us for applying this word of God to the current circumstances of our time and our country while they wall themselves up in preaching that is disincarnate and spiritualistic and at times even boastful and untruthful, such as the great campaigns of healing, then it is not the true word of God. When that happens, it becomes the speech of human beings, the speech of charlatans, the speech of conformists. There is a reason why the government supports the Protestant campaigns. Naturally, that kind of preaching doesn't disturb anyone: blessed be this Christianity that doesn't touch the wounds of our society! But the Bible we need for today is preaching that proclaims God's word saying, «Thus says the Lord».

Another thing about God's word, sisters and brothers, is that, being seed, it carries the origins of life. That is why the church performs the sacraments when she takes the word up and applies it. The sacraments are another aspect of the word of God. We have now moved beyond that old distinction between evangelization and sacramentalization. At times, unfortunately, we have sacramentalized without the word of God. Today, thanks be to God, instruction is required before receiving the sacraments. Please be docile in attending those talks that prepare you for the sacrament of baptism because it is only when you understand a sacrament as God's word containing God's revelation that it makes sense to pour water on a child's head at the baptismal font. If there is no evangelization, what sense does it make? Also, if people don't understand what the Gospel says about the Holy Spirit that is given in confirmation, what's the sense in bringing a child so the bishop can make a cross on her forehead with oil and give her a little slap on her cheek? What's the use of two people who love one another and get married in the church just as a social convention if they don't understand the great mystery that Saint Paul explains in the Bible, the mystery of Christ who marries the church and dies for her and the mystery of a church that lives faithful to Christ? The sacraments without Gospel, the sacraments without God's word become almost magic, a matter of custom, routine, or family tradition. People say, «We baptized the child because everyone in our family is baptized», but few say, «because I want him to be Christian».

In this sense, then, sisters and brothers, the sacraments are also an aspect of the seed of the word, the grace of God. In regard to the Eucharist, for example, don't come just to hear a discourse. I would be quite unhappy if that were the only reason I spoke in the church. When I give the homily, I know in conscience that that is my pastoral duty, and I also know that my homily should bring people to the altar and that there we will share in faith in the presence of that Christ who is the same Word that I preach. I just prepare you for that Word that speaks, that sanctifies, that redeems, that becomes the life of those who worship and receive communion. The Sunday Eucharist cannot be separated from the Word of God. After the homily we approach the altar, and in the Body and Blood of Christ we worship the Word that has silently penetrated deep into the hearts of all those who have reflected on God's Word, who have placed all their hope in Christ, and who make him present in our society.

If the church preaches and says, «This is the word of God», is she crazy? By what principle can she say that? This is a very interesting matter, sisters and brothers, something you should understand. That Spirit of God who inspired Christ and raised him from the dead and gives him eternal life is the same Spirit that the risen Christ gave to his church on Easter night when he breathed on the disciples and told them, «Receive the Holy Spirit» (John 20:22). And it is the same Spirit that on Pentecost took possession of this church in the form of a hurricane and tongues of fire (Acts 2:3-4), and it is thanks to that life of Christ in the Holy Spirit that this church continues to preach the word of God.

How different it is to preach here, at this moment, than to speak as friends with any one of you! In this instant I know that I am serving as an instrument of the Spirit of God in his church for guiding the people, and I can say like Christ, «The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor» (Luke 4:18). The same Spirit who animated Christ and gave strength to that body born of the Virgin so that he would be a victim for the world's salvation is the same Spirit that also gives power and inspiration to my throat, to my tongue, and to my feeble limbs. And this same Spirit gives you, the people of God, the ability to hear God's word in the way it should be heard. I know that many people do not hear me with such a supernatural spirit, and of them I can cite the parable: they are the seed that falls on the roadway and is carried off by the evil one (Matt 13:4, 19). But I also know that many listen to me like the earth in today's parable, which gladly receives the seed (Matt 13:8, 23). The Spirit of God gives that earth which is your heart the capacity to hear supernaturally and the grace to be able to listen. That's why I told you that the preacher not only teaches but also learns. You are the ones who teach me. Your attentiveness to me is also by the Holy Spirit's inspiration. Your rejection of me would be like God's rejection. That's why I told you that people have a sense of infallibility which is called the «sense of faith». The Holy Spirit gives it to everyone, even the humblest woman among the people, so that when they listen to a bishop or a priest they know how to discern and at least be suspicious: «That teaching must not be from the Gospel!»

But when I see such attention, such faith, and especially such conversion, sisters and brothers, when I see people seeking the church and seeking God, I say with joy, «*Digitus Dei est hic*, the finger of God is here». And so within this context of applying the word to our reality, I denounce what must be denounced, but I also announce our reasons for rejoicing. And so I take advantage of this context of God's word which has become our word here, for on this July 16, 1978, God is speaking through me. The Council says that the people of God should consider by the light of faith what are their aspirations, their demands, and their ideals, and as people of faith they will know how to discern in the signs of the times what God desires (GS 4). Certainly, not everything that people demand is the word of God, but deep within our demands of the present moment there is much of God, and here is where we have to discern.

Events of the week

This is the reason why, when I relate to you some events of the week in the light of this word, you yourselves discover where God is and where the devil is. You see how God is leading his people along the paths of goodness and how God is being rejected by those who do not desire salvation in Christ.

I give you an example so that you can see that the church is preaching the word and signaling concrete events not only here but throughout the Latin American continent. Sixty cardinals, archbishops, and bishops meeting in Bogotá discussed the concerns of the whole continent as expressed by the consultative body that is preparing the study document that will be presented in Puebla in October. The bishops doing this study point out the extraordinary social injustice that is reflected above all in the concentration of wealth in the hands of just a few people. They said that only ten percent of the population of Latin America has amassed the bulk of the wealth while the immense majority of people endures every type of need. Some people will say they're «communists»; I say they are a reflection of the church.

These bishops who represent all the Latin American bishops say that the lack of just, well-paid employment has resulted in a dramatic increase in criminality. If there is terrorism, then it must be eliminated but not by repression. What must be changed are the unjust, disordered structures from which terrorist violence emerges. The bishops also state that the social injustice in the hemisphere could provoke a veritable cataclysm if the masses were to rise up against the privileged. They speak of the transnational corporations that have not brought benefits to the Latin American countries but have rather been sources of corruption and immorality even in their home countries. The church expresses her concern about the propagation of military dictatorships in Latin America, but she also points out that the corruption of the traditional politicians and their inability to maintain a stable democracy have made it possible for these military dictatorships to seize control of governments. The bishops in Colombia assert that the military regimes frequently violate human rights, but in the same document they say that the church has enjoyed certain freedoms. Thank God the church in El Salvador can still speak, and we hope no one attempts to stifle this voice because if the church speaks, she must proclaim the truth; otherwise it would be better not to speak. The church also expresses her concern about the decline of the union movement in Latin America, especially in countries governed by the military.

Certainly here in our country, sisters and brothers, we have concrete cases that confirm this statement of the Latin American hierarchy. The kind of raid the Jesuits experienced last Saturday is not an isolated case; that's happening a lot in the city and above all in the countryside, and it intensifies a climate of fear and insecurity. On July 2 about 500 commandos occupied the village of Río Seco and searched the houses. On July 4 there were searches also in Jocoaitique, Torola, and El Tránsito—people were beaten, and it's reported that the houses of the defenseless people were robbed. Also in the village of El Cacao de Cinquera they took two *campesinos* away on July 6, and they waited four days before presenting them to the courts.

The anguished lament of Mrs. Matsumoto finds no echo, and it is also unjust and tragic that the cries of the mothers engaged in a hunger strike have not been heard. The church was asked to collaborate, and she offered assistance in taking one of the mothers, near death because of the hunger strike, from the Red Cross offices to a medical center—she did this jointly with the Red Cross and the Human Rights Council.

The labor conflicts discussed by the bishops in Colombia are also realities here in El Salvador. Conflicts have still not been resolved in INCA, in TAPPAN, in INDECA, CEL, COPLASA, IRA, Minas de San Sebastián, Minas de San Cristóbal, Sacos Cuscatlán, IUSA, Guantes, DIANA, Refinería Salvadoreña de Azucar, Corcho y Lata, etc.

We also want to support the presentation that one political party made to the Supreme Court of Justice against the magistrates of the First Criminal Court, whose way of proceeding violates the guarantees of the Law of Public Order. They claim that the persons accused are prevented from receiving assistance from their defense lawyers, that processes are drawn out, that prisoners are illegally detained, and that justice has not been done for prisoners who have denounced before the court that they were tortured by the security forces and paramilitary groups. The political party asks that these claims be thoroughly investigated, that acts that violate the law cease, and that those responsible be sanctioned³. I believe that there is nothing

³ The Democratic Nationalist Union (UDN) demanded respect for the rights of political prisoners. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (12 July 1978).

more just; this is very much in line with what the church told the Supreme Court of Justice clearly on Pentecost day: now is the time to examine all these anomalies and correct them for the sake of our country's honor.

I also want to tell the *campesinos* that new salaries have been approved. The new salary is 4.25 *colones* for male workers over sixteen years old, and it is 3.65 *colones* for female workers over sixteen, for minors of both sexes, and for partially handicapped workers⁴. I'm only surprised that women continue to be discriminated against and given the same salary as children and handicapped workers. Why don't they have the same right as men to a salary of 4.25?

Our church is also pleased with the attitude of the bishops of Panama who criticized the defects in the structures of the present Panamanian government. They spoke of the need to develop a national will to create a new, more just social order that eliminates the exploitation of some persons by others and therefore requires new socio-economic structures. Among the serious defects of the present political structure the Panamanian bishops pointed out the lack of any clear and decisive separation among the three branches of government, the lack of an efficient political administration, and the unrepresentative electoral system by which the elected representatives of the districts elect in turn the president. The bishops also considered it unacceptable that certain Marxist factions seek to set themselves up as the political voice not only of the government but of the whole nation. I want to congratulate Archbishop McGrath and all our beloved brother bishops of Panama for this attitude which, as you can see, is not something that is foreign to us. We rejoice to see this position our church has taken confirmed in the Latin American continent.

We therefore also rejoice that our communities, our newspaper, and our radio station have been expressing their solidarity with our beloved Father Hermógenes López, who is truly a martyr. He was slain by the bullets of the powerful for having defended the water of his people.

In this account of events, sisters and brothers, there are also heartening items. I don't want to keep silence this morning about Don Fernando Levy; I urge you to pray for his eternal rest. On July 9 this man died to save the lives of some children caught in a rip tide in the sea at El Balsamar, department of La Libertad. Thank God for this spirit of goodness to the point of heroism. Such gestures fill us with hope that in El Salvador there are good hearts that will make this seed of God prevail.

But as you can see, the word of God, while remaining the same, engages with real situations, and that's what I mean when I say that we cannot cease to shed the light of the eternal word on the concrete realities in which our people live.

The proclamation of this word is the sowing called evangelization

For my second thought, then, I say that this word is sown. I want to tell you that this is one of the great concerns of the church today: evangelization. There is a Council document, there was a synod of bishops, and now the meeting at Puebla will have as its theme «the evangelization of Latin America in the present and in the future».

⁴ These are the minimum salaries. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (13 July 1978).

It's a shame that time passes so quickly, sisters and brothers, but I wanted to read to you here the superb synthesis that Pope Paul VI composed about evangelization after listening to bishops from around the world during the synod of 1974. This is a magnificent document that I encourage everyone to read, especially the base communities. In it the pope asks, «What is evangelization?», and he goes on to answer that it is a very complex and dynamic reality (EN 17). In order to have a complete idea of evangelization it's necessary to consider all its component parts, and he proposed the following elements:

First, bringing the Good News to the whole world so that it becomes a leaven in every culture, so that it converts people's consciences both individually and collectively, so that people develop Gospel criteria and not the unjust criteria of the world. This is the first meaning of evangelization: bringing the criteria of Christ's Gospel to all men and women so that they are renewed in their own commitments (EN 18).

Second, evangelization is a testimony of life. Evangelizing is not just saying words. Preaching is relatively easy, but living what is preached is not. That is what I told the Holy Father in Rome: «Holy Father, it's very easy to observe the doctrines of the Holy See and the magisterium, to praise them, to extol them, and to defend them theoretically. But when it's a matter of incarnating that doctrine, making it part of the life of a diocese or a community, and pointing out the concrete deeds that are contrary to this doctrine—that's when conflicts arise». And this is the life of our archdiocese, sisters and brothers. However, because not all of us are ready to commit ourselves to bearing witness, not everyone suffers persecution, and it's easy for some to say there is no persecution. But every priest, religious, and lay person who wants to announce Christ's Gospel in truth must suffer persecution. The testimony of life is necessary, and here I make an appeal that the lives of all of you and my own as well become in truth a kind of silent preaching. In this way we live the Gospel instead of just preaching nice sermons and not living it. In a private conversation the Holy Father also told me, «Let us not be content just with preaching; we must live what we preach». Help me, sisters and brothers, with your prayers so that I also can bear witness to what I am preaching (EN 21).

The third element of evangelization or sowing the word is the explicit announcement. It's not enough to give good example and then be silent when one should speak. There is a need to speak; there is a need to preach the content of God's revelation; there is a need to tell people that God loves us, that God wants us to be good, that Christ died for truth and for justice, that Christ's redemption also has certain liberating consequences. Here the document instructs us beautifully about the true liberation which the church cannot ignore (EN 30). It speaks about the need to belong vitally and visibly to a community that follows Christ (EN 23); that is, we should not feel embarrassed by the church and should accept the church's sacraments as a sign that we belong to her. You can see how the pope dissolves that dichotomy between evangelization and sacramentalization; he goes as far as to say that «the sacraments become the seal of evangelization» (EN 47). When people only hear the Gospel but don't receive the sacraments, they are not truly evangelized. But when here in the cathedral we see people meditating on the word of God and then being nourished by the Eucharist; when we see contrite consciences weeping for their sins and being restored to God's grace; when we see people seeking a blessing for their living together as couples; when we see people trying to escape their addictions or trying to overcome the lure of drugs or prostitution; when we see people truly trying to open themselves to God's grace, then we have evangelization that adheres completely in its customs to the laws of the Lord (EN 21).

Finally, sisters and brothers, there is a new impulse to evangelize. The person who is evangelized must evangelize others. The community is evangelized in order to evangelize (EN 24). A base community must be a group that reflects on the word of God in order to learn to live according to that word but also to transmit it, to radiate it. The same applies to the home, to the married couple, to the community. We all have to be apostles and sowers: «A sower went out to sow his seed» (Matt 13:3). This beautiful parable we're meditating on must be told about all of us.

The harvesting of this crop is the integral salvation of humankind and the world

And finally, sisters and brothers—I'm going to conclude!—my third thought is what is most encouraging in today's scriptures, namely, the second reading from Saint Paul which speaks to us about the harvest. This seed has to produce a harvest. Saint Paul tells us about the glorification that one day will be given to us, a glorification that is superior to all the pains and sufferings that can be experienced on this earth (Rom 8:18). I heard these words of Saint Paul in these days, but I heard them translated into the suffering of a man who was tortured and kept three days with his fingers bound. As he suffered he kept saying, «The hope that I have and the glory I await are greater than these sufferings». Take heart, you dear ones who are persecuted! Take heart, you who are tortured! Take heart, all you who hope for a better homeland but see no horizons! Your sufferings are the condition of redemption that is won only with a Christ nailed to a cross—but afterward came the resurrection! And in Christ's heart there was never any dimming of the certainty that the world would be redeemed despite his apparent failure. We Christians cannot fail, because we bear the Spirit that raised up Christ.

There is still another marvelous fruit of this harvest. We behold the whole world, the whole of creation, so subject to human failings that Saint Paul must utter the tragic words in today's reading: «Creation awaits with eager expectation the revelation of the children of God; for creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that creation itself would be free from slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God» (Rom 8:19-21).

Notice that this liberation that Christians hope for is not just for human beings, nor is it the kind of liberation by which those who are oppressed today will tomorrow set about oppressing others. By doing that they only make creation groan under their sin (Rom 8:22), and this happens often when earthly liberation movements rise to power. Once in power they become even more abusive toward the people they said they were going to redeem. In contrast, the liberation that Christ offers—and that Saint Paul carries to the cosmic limits of creation—comes about when the creation is truly freed from the selfishness, pride, envy, and arrogance to which it is now subject. Creation is not evil; money is not evil; large estates are not evil; the lands are good. «God looked at what he had made, and it was good», says the Bible (Gen 1:31). Who has subjected it to evil? Human beings have, through sin—human beings who want to appropriate the happiness of others; selfish people who want everything for themselves and care nothing about others. And as a result, those who are left out become violent and hateful and surrender their own bodies and their own lives to sin. This is the natural creation that is now groaning. Paul's comparison is a good one: «the whole creation groans» like a woman about to give birth, but she does so with the sure hope that she is bringing a new being into the world. So also nature and humankind are groaning (Rom 8:22). We are suffering the pains of childbirth in El Salvador. That's why it hurts so much. And it hurts, brothers and sisters,

because it is one person against another; it is *campesino* against *campesino*; it is fellow citizen against fellow citizen. This is the time when a new world must be born. But the redemption will come, says Saint Paul, to the extent that we make the sowing of the Gospel our own work. That's why Christ compares the different kinds of land where the seed falls.

Some scholars say that this parable does not come from Jesus Christ but from the primitive Christian community, from the time when the first Christians began to experience what we're experiencing so vividly now, that not everyone receives Christ's word with the same enthusiasm. Or they receive it enthusiastically but then become cowards in the face of persecution and take flight. Then there are those who want to receive a word in their heart, but one that can grow along with their love of riches; they want to adore both God and their wealth. These various types correspond to the different kinds of earth in this parable—part of the seed falls on rocky ground, part on the path, and part among thorns (Matt 18:18-22).

Sisters and brothers, this is a magnificent examination of conscience for each one of us! What kind of heart do I have? What kind of Christian am I? Am I good soil or unreliable soil? Am I a coward who prefers the advantages of soil where the briars and thorns of this world's pleasure flourish? «I don't want to leave these things, but I would like to be a Christian». «I go to Mass, but I'd like to hear the priest speak words sweet to my ears and not touch my wounds». «Nowadays you can't go to Mass any more because everywhere they're causing trouble». Clearly, these are people who want God's word to grow in their hearts along with their selfishness and their vices. This cannot be. It is impossible to serve two masters (Matt 6:24). The authentic church must preach the true and only Lord, the true and only Word, the only Word that saves and bears fruit, the word that Christ sows—not the word that the devil and human indulgence would like to sow.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, I conclude by evoking the creature who made God's word most fruitful. On this her special day how can we not reflect on the Virgin of Carmel? All our people look to her with hope, but not exactly in search of an easy salvation. Mary is the first to tell us, as she told the servants of Cana in Galilee, «Do whatever he tells you» (John 2:5). I cannot save anyone who does not obey God's word. When a woman from the crowd congratulated Christ for the mother who bore him, Christ told her, «It is not only my mother who is blessed. Any woman could do that. She is great because she hears God's word and puts it in practice» (Luke 11:27). This is what makes Mary great: her holiness, the fruitfulness of God's Word in her. When she found the Child Jesus lost in the temple, the gospel uses a beautiful expression that could serve as the motto of all Christians: «She kept all these things in her heart» (Luke 2:51). The same phrase is used when the shepherds came to adore the child in Bethlehem: «Mary reflected on God's word in her heart» (Luke 2:19). In other words, when Mary heard the word of God, she reflected upon this word in her heart. This is the holiness of Christians: letting the word of God fall on fertile ground.

Dear sisters and brothers, even as I am trying to sow the word this morning, my hope is that I am not only a sower but also a fertile soil for this word. Let us help one another mutually. Let us create a church community in which the word of the Lord produces not thirty- and sixty-fold but a hundred-fold (Matt 13:23). Let us now stand and profess our faith.