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The Church Serves Personal, Communal, and Transcendent Liberation

**Fifth Sunday in Lent
23 March 1980**

Isaiah 43:16-21

Philippians 3:8-14

John 8:1-11

Dear sisters and brothers, we are joined today in our celebration of the word and the Eucharist by members of an ecumenical mission that is visiting El Salvador these days in order to learn about the human rights situation here. One of the visitors is Reverend Alan McCoy, a Franciscan priest who is president of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men in the United States; he joins Father Juan Macho Merino and me in presiding at this Mass. (Applause) Also with us are Mr. Thomas Quigley, a layman from the Latin American division of the U.S. Conference of Bishops (Applause); Reverend William Wipfler, from the human rights program of the National Council of Churches in the United States (Applause); Mrs. Betty Nute Richardson, from the American Friends Service Committee, also of the United States (Applause); and Mr. Ronald Joung, from the education for peace program of the Friends Service Committee. (Applause) We can sense in them and in their Christian spirit the solidarity of North America. They help us understand how the Gospel is able to illuminate all different kinds of society. Starting out always from that respect for human beings that our Lord has revealed to us, they stand in solidarity with a church that is trying hard to defend those human rights that have been terribly violated in our country. We are very thankful to them. (Applause) May these days they spend among us contribute greatly to making their Christian commitment even stronger. And may they increase our own understanding of other countries so that we will realize that our efforts are being understood and supported by everyone who is truly instructed by the light of the Gospel.

We send our greetings to the listeners of YSAX who have been waiting for this moment for so long, and now, thank God, it has arrived! (Applause) We are not ignorant of the risks our poor little station is running for serving as an instrument of justice and a vehicle of truth, but we know that risks need to be taken for the sake of all those people who support this word of truth and justice. (Applause) I'm happy that we can also count this morning on the collaboration of Radio Noticias del Continente, which by means of telephone and our transmitter is carrying our voice to Latin America, as they have done the last few Sundays. (Applause)

The reporter Demetrio Olaziregui is here with us, and he has informed us that a bomb with several charges of dynamite exploded near the studios of that station in Costa Rica. It partially destroyed the wall and all the windows of their two-story building. They had to go off the air for a while, but later they restored operations, and they continue to provide us this

marvelous service. (Applause) He tells us that they will continue to transmit the homilies since there is demand for them in Venezuela, Colombia, and even Brazil. That station has received 300 to 400 letters reporting that people can hear the shortwave clearly in Honduras, Nicaragua, and in many other parts of El Salvador itself.

We must therefore give thanks to God that this message which seeks only to be a modest reflection on the divine word is finding marvelous channels for spreading abroad and reaching many people. We want to tell you all that this whole context of Lent is a preparation for our Easter and that Easter itself is a cry of victory, for no one can extinguish the life of the risen Christ. No longer can death or hatred or all those deathly dealings prevail against him or his church, for he is the Conqueror! (Applause)

But just as Christ will flourish in the unending resurrection of Easter, so we must accompany him also in the cross, the sacrifice, and the martyrdom of Lent and Holy Week. He told us, «Blessed are those who are not scandalized by the cross!» Lent, then, is a call to celebrate our redemption in that difficult mystery of cross and victory. At the present time our people are well prepared: all our surroundings speak to us of the cross. But those who have Christian faith and hope know that behind the calvary of El Salvador lies our Easter and our resurrection, and that is the hope we have as a Christian people. (Applause)

During these Sundays of Lent I have been trying to uncover in divine revelation, in the word read here at Mass, God's project for saving persons and peoples. In our time, when so many diverse historical projects arise for our people, we can be sure that the project that wins out will be the one that best reflects God's project, and this is the church's mission. It is for this reason, dear sisters and brothers, that we have the duty to examine our own reality in the light of the divine word that reveals God's project. We must try to see whether that project of God is being realized among us or is instead being reviled. No one should take it amiss that we illuminate our social, political, and economic realities by the light of the divine word read in our Mass because if we did not do so, we would not really be Christian. This is why Christ wanted to become incarnate: so the light that he brings from the Father can become the life of persons and peoples.

I am well aware that many are scandalized by such speech and claim that it's meddling in politics instead of preaching the Gospel, but I don't accept that accusation. I am making an effort to communicate everything taught by the Second Vatican Council and the bishops' meetings at Medellín and Puebla. I do this so that we don't just have it on paper and study it theoretically but rather make it reality and apply it to our situation of conflict. This is how the Gospel must be preached for our people. (Applause) That is why, as I listen all during the week to the cries of the people and behold so much horrible crime and such shameful violence, I ask the Lord to give me appropriate words for consoling, for denouncing, and for calling to repentance. Though I continue to be a voice crying out in the desert, I know that the church is trying hard to fulfill her mission. (Applause)

During these Sundays of Lent, then, we have seen how God's project can be synthesized. Christ is the way, and so he is presented to us as fasting and overcoming temptations in the desert. Christ is the goal and the impulse of life, and so he is presented to us transfigured, thus calling us to that goal to which all men and women are called. Then the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent explained the collaboration that God asks of us in order to save us, namely, our conversion and reconciliation with him. Some wonderful examples are offered, such as the

barren fig tree, the prodigal son, and—this morning—the adulterous women who repents and is pardoned. God issues his call and tells us that he will treat us in the same way as the father treated the prodigal son and as the Savior treated the adulterous woman. There is no sin that cannot be forgiven, and there is no enmity that cannot be reconciled when there is conversion and sincere return to the Lord. That is the message of Lent!

The readings of Lent also tell us how God makes his project concrete in history so that the history of each nation becomes his own history of salvation. To the extent that the nations reflect God's project of saving us by conversion in Christ, to the same extent they will be saved and will live happily. That is why the basic text for the whole of Lent is the history of Israel, the model people, the exemplary people. Even in their sins and infidelities they were exemplary, so that we could learn how God punishes such failures, and they were also a model since they brought us the promise of God's salvation. We started with Abraham and then journeyed with Moses through the desert. With Joshua we arrived in the Promised Land and celebrated the first Passover, and today we are being invited to join the second Exodus, the return from Babylon. This is a history that every people must imitate, not because every people is the same as Israel but because in every people there exists a group of those who follow Christ. They are not the whole population, but they are the faithful ones, the people of God. The example we have here this morning, therefore, is marvelous: followers of Christ from there in the United States have come to share with followers of Christ here in El Salvador. In that great nation to the north they are the voice of the Gospel crying out against the injustices of that society. (Applause) And now they have come to express their solidarity so that we, the people of God in El Salvador, may courageously denounce the injustices of our own society! (Applause)

In the light of the divine word of today, I am going to present this reflection under the title: «The Church Serves Personal, Communal, and Transcendent Liberation». These three adjectives mark out the three reflections of today's homily: first, there is an urgent need to liberate personal dignity; second, God wants to save the people as a whole; and third, transcendence is the true and definitive dimension of liberation. All this becomes evident from today's readings.

There is an urgent need to liberate personal dignity

First of all, as we see there in the gospel, there is an urgent need to save the dignity of persons. I can find no more beautiful example of saving human dignity than the figure of the sinless Jesus face to face with the adulterous woman who was surprised in the act and humiliated. Those who caught her want to sentence her to stoning. Without saying a word Jesus reproaches those who would judge her with their own sins, and then he asks the woman, «Has no one condemned you?» «No one, sir». «Then neither do I condemn you. But sin no more». (John 8:10-11). Strength, but tenderness. Human dignity comes first.

There was a legal problem in Jesus' time: according to Deuteronomy, any woman caught committing adultery was to die (Deut 22:22-24). When this woman was caught, the Pharisees and scribes were debating how she should die, whether by stoning or strangulation or some other way. Thus they said to Jesus, «This woman was caught in adultery. Our law says she should die. What do you say?» (John 8:4-5). In other words, they were asking him, «How should we kill her?» Jesus was not concerned about the legalistic details. Calmly rising above the malice of those trying to entrap him, he began to write on the ground, like someone scribbling notes on a piece of paper. The crowd kept insisting until Jesus responded with cleverness and

wisdom, «Let the one among you who has no sin be the first to cast a stone» (John 8:7). He touched their conscience. They were witnesses of the deed, and according to the ancient laws the witnesses were to throw the first stones. As they examined their own consciences, however, they realized that they were witnesses of their own sins. Thus was the woman's dignity saved. God does not save sin, but he does save the dignity of a woman submerged in sin. He has come in love precisely to save sinners, and here we have a perfect case. Converting the woman is much better than stoning her. Forgiving her and saving her is much better than condemning her. The law must preserve human dignity rather than serve the false legalisms that so often trample on the honor of persons. With shocking realism the gospel reports, «They began to go away, beginning with the oldest» (John 8:9). They had been busy their whole lives offending God. All those years they should have been growing in their dedication to humanity and to the human dignity that comes from God, but instead their lives became ever more hypocritical. They hid their own sins, which grew along with their age.

Personal sin is at the base of the great social sin. We must keep this in mind, dear sisters and brothers, because today it is very easy for us to be like those who witnessed the adultery: we point it out and demand justice, but we look very little into our own consciences. How easy we find it to condemn structural injustice, institutional violence, and social sin! All that is quite real, but where are the sources of that social sin? They are in the heart of every person. Modern-day society is an anonymous society in which nobody accepts blame but everybody is responsible. All of us are responsible for what happens, but the sin remains anonymous. We are all sinners, and we have all contributed our grain of sand to this mountain of crimes and violence in our country.

That is why salvation begins with the human person, with human dignity, with freeing every individual from sin. This is God's call during Lent: let each and every one be converted! Among all of us who are here, there are not two sinners who are the same. Each of us has committed our own shameful deeds, but we want to hide them and shift the blame to others. I also am a sinner and must take off my mask. I have offended God and society, and I must ask forgiveness of God. This is the call of Christ: the human person comes first.

Quite beautiful was the response of that woman who now felt forgiven and understood: «No one, sir. No one has condemned me». «Well, neither do I condemn you. I could truly have judged you harshly, but I did not. Take care, then, not to sin again» (John 8:11). Let us be careful, sisters and brothers. If God has forgiven us so many times, let us make the best of the friendship with the Lord that we have recovered, and let us be grateful for it.

This text provides a fine example of Christianity's promotion of women. If women today have attained a status similar to that of men, it is due in large part to this Gospel of Jesus Christ. In those times people were shocked when Christ spoke with the Samaritan woman since it was below men's dignity to talk with women (John 4:27). But Jesus knows that we are all equal: «Now there is neither Greek nor Jew, neither man nor woman, but all are children of God» (Gal 3:28). Women should be doubly grateful to Christianity because it is Christ who by his message has affirmed the greatness of women. Those feminine gifts can reach great heights, but often they are not promoted or appreciated due to the machismo of us men.

The men who were witnesses in this scene also learned that redemption begins with human dignity and that, before being judges administering justice, they had to be upright and

honest. They had to be able to pass judgment with a clean conscience because they would be the first to be judged if they committed that crime.

Look closely at this gospel so as to learn something of how considerate Jesus is with the other person. He always sees the person, no matter how sinful, as a child of God, an image of the Lord. He does not condemn but only forgives. He does not condone the sin—he strongly rejects it—but he knows how to condemn the sin and save the sinner. He does not subordinate the human person to the law. This is very important in these days. Christ has said, «The Sabbath was made for people, not people for the Sabbath» (Mark 2:27). Our country's constitution has been breached in every way, so let us not invoke it now to defend our own personal interests. The law is for people, not people for the law. By giving true primacy to human dignity, Jesus is a source of peace. People feel they matter to Jesus, who has no sin and no need to repent. Returning to him with sincerity is the greatest joy a human being can have.

In today's second reading we have another example of a sinner who for a long time walked in darkness but who came to know Christ and was saved by him. The whole aspiration and goal of his life then became to attain Christ, and as he told us in today's epistle, «Everything else I consider rubbish» (Phil 3:8). When we stop worshiping the things of earth and come to know our true God and our true Savior, then all the ideologies of earth, all the strategies of earth, all the idols of power and wealth and possession appear as rubbish. Saint Paul actually uses a stronger word: «manure». «For the sake of gaining Christ, everything else appears like rubbish» (Phil 3:8).

I will not weary you, sisters and brothers, by reading all the rich content of a theological passage in the Puebla document. Puebla has three main theological themes: the truth about Christ, the truth about the church, and the truth about humanity. The bishops of the continent there in Puebla made a firm commitment to the human person by rejecting the false and biased visions of earth, especially those that make people into instruments of exploitation. They rejected visions like the Marxist ideologies that make human beings simply cogs in a machine, but they also rejected the visions that make national security the main concern of the state, as if the state were the master and the people were its slaves. It is the reverse that is true: the people are not for the state; the state is for the people. In order to promote humanity, human beings must be at the forefront of every human organization. We bishops of Latin America have therefore made this commitment: «We profess that all men and all women, however insignificant they may seem, possess an inviolable nobility that they themselves and others must respect unconditionally. We profess that every human life, no matter its circumstance, deserves to be dignified. We profess that all human community must be founded on the common good in ways consistent with the fostering of ever greater dignity and harmony. This requires that people be willing to sacrifice even their own possessions and that no individuals be made the instruments of others» (P 317). (Applause) This is the basis of the sociology that we have learned from Christ in his Gospel. It is above all the individual who needs to be saved, and individual sin is the first thing we must repair. Our individual relations and accounts with God set the groundwork for everything else. Those who enslave the soul to sin are false liberators. They cry out for liberation but they sometimes act with great cruelty because they neither love nor respect the human person. (Applause)

God wants to save the people as a whole

My second reflection moves from focusing on the individual to focusing on the community. What is beautiful in today's reading is the way in which God saves individuals *as a people*. It is the whole people that God wants to save.

Today's first reading, one of the famous hymns of Isaiah, presents God speaking with the people. God is in dialogue with a «collective personality»—that's what the Scripture scholars call it. God spoke with the Jewish people as if with an individual, and he made that people his own because he was going to entrust to them promises and revelations that would later be offered to all the other peoples of the world. Take good note of this aspect of the Bible, dear sisters and brothers. In the Old Testament there are things that refer only to the people of God, but there are also things that refer to people in general, the natural people. The prophets often had to reproach Israel for boasting that they were children of Abraham, and yet they did not obey God or even believe in God! Instead they were just as wayward as the other peoples whom they called Gentiles.

Nevertheless, that nucleus called the people of God was the collective personality with whom God spoke, and that collectivity developed through Christ to include all Christians. There would no longer be a chosen group only within the people of Israel; there would now be a chosen group in every country. And we have an example of that right here this morning. In the United States there is a group of Christians which is not the whole United States, just as here in El Salvador there is a church group that is not all El Salvador. When I as pastor address the people of God, I don't claim to be a teacher for all El Salvador. I am just a poor servant of a nucleus that is called the church, the archdiocese, those who want to follow Christ and who recognize the bishop as the teacher who speaks to them in the name of Christ. From them I expect respect and obedience; with them I feel closely united. I am not bothered when I am criticized, maligned, and discounted by those who are not church, even though they may be in the church. (Applause) They may be baptized and come to Mass, but if they don't unite in solidarity with the strict teachings of the Gospel and with the way we apply them in our pastoral work, then they are not the people of God, even by New Testament norms. So let us know how to discern well, sisters and brothers, so that we don't play around with that sacred name of «the people». For us, the people of God is that nucleus of Salvadorans who believe in Christ and who want to follow him faithfully and be nourished with his life and his sacraments in union with his pastors.

This people of God becomes a reality in history. Did you notice the beautiful message in today's first reading? God says, «You reminisce about the first exodus, when I freed you from Egypt and you wandered through the desert. So many miracles were done on that journey with Moses! But reminisce no longer about the past; that has remained behind as history. Now I am making all things new!» (Isa 43:18-19). What a magnificent expression: God is the one who makes things new! It is God who moves forward with history. The exodus was now going to move in a different direction, toward exile, toward Babylon. The desert through which the people passed would blossom like a garden, and waters would flow there. These were the symbols of God's pardon and of the people's reconciliation with God as they moved toward Jerusalem, now not from slavery in Egypt but from exile in Babylon. And so history keeps moving forward.

Today El Salvador is experiencing its own exodus. Today we are moving toward liberation through a desert strewn with corpses. Anguish and sorrow assail us, and many of us experience the same temptations as those who walked with Moses: they rebelled and wanted to turn back. We have the saying, «history repeats itself», but that is not true. There are certain things that seem to be repeated, but there are many circumstances and events that are not repeated. We are witnesses of this in El Salvador. How dense is our history, how it changes from one day to the next! One leaves El Salvador and returns the following week, and it seems that history has turned completely around. We can no longer judge things the way we used to judge them. But there is one thing we must keep firmly anchored in our souls: faith in Jesus Christ and in the God of history. Even though that faith never changes, God takes delight in changing history: «I make all things new». God plays with history, so the grace of Christians should not remain stuck in traditions that are no longer sustainable. Instead we must apply the eternal tradition of Christ to our present realities. My dear friends, when dealing with the changes in the church or with changes that occurred in other eras and in other systems, we need to ask God for the grace that will enable us to embrace these changes in a way that helps us understand the present reality without betraying our faith. We need changes in the church, dear sisters and brothers, especially those of us who have been formed in other epochs and in other systems. We must ask the Lord for the grace to know how to understand the present day and adapt to it without betraying our faith.

God makes things new, and that is why he chastised the Israelites: they were celebrating the first Exodus without realizing that God was already working wonders in a second Exodus. And he works even greater wonders in the Christian era, as we keep seeing ourselves. History will not fail; God sustains it. That is why I say that the more our historical projects try to reflect God's eternal project, the more they will reflect the kingdom of God. That is the work of the church, the people of God in history, and that is why the church does not become wedded to any social system or to any political organization or party. The church does not fall prey to any of those forces because she is the eternal pilgrim of history who keeps pointing out, in every historical epoch, what truly reflects the kingdom of God and what does not. She is totally at the service of God's kingdom. (Applause)

The great task of Christians is to become absorbed in God's kingdom and, with our souls so absorbed, to work also on the projects of history. It is a good thing to unite in the people's organizations; it is a good thing to create political parties; it is a good thing to take part in government. All that is good, as long as you're a Christian who reflects the kingdom of God and tries to implant it wherever you're working—as long as you're not a plaything of earthly ambitions. (Applause) This is the great duty of today's men and women. I have always told you, dear Christians, and I'll tell you again: it is from here, from Christian groups, from the people of God that the true liberators of our people must emerge. (Applause) Any historical project not founded on the themes we treated in our first point—the dignity of the human person, the will of God, the kingdom of Christ among us—will be an ephemeral affair. In contrast, the project that best reflects the eternal design of God will be ever more stable and ever more capable of working for the common good of all peoples according to their needs. I ask you, my dear brothers and sisters in politics, not to manipulate the church so that she will say what you want her to say. Rather, announce what the church is teaching, for she has no vested interests. I have no desire for power, and that is why I am completely free to tell power what is good and what is bad. I can tell any political group what is good and what is bad—that is my duty.

As church, we need to unify our criteria on the basis of the freedom of God's kingdom. For the church is not just the bishop and the priests; the church is all of you, the faithful, the religious, the Catholic schools, everything that is the people of God, the nucleus of all those who believe in Christ. We should not be disunited; we should not appear scattered. Often we may appear confused in dealing with the people's political organizations, as if we were anxious to please them more than the kingdom of God and his eternal designs. We don't have to beg anything from anybody because we have much to offer to everybody. (Applause) This is not arrogance; it is the grateful humility of those who have received from God a revelation that is to be communicated to others. (Applause)

Transcendence is the true and definitive dimension of liberation

Finally, the third reflection taken from today's readings is that God's project for the liberation of the people is something transcendent. Transcendence is the true and definitive dimension of liberation.

I think I may be repeating this idea too much, but I don't tire of repeating it because we are in great danger of wanting to escape from urgent problems by applying immediate solutions, and we forget that short-term measures can be patches and not true solutions. The true solution has to match up with the definitive project of God. Any solution we devise for a better distribution of land, for better financial administration in El Salvador, or for political organizations dedicated to the welfare of Salvadorans will always have to be sought in conjunction with our definitive liberation.

Not long ago I was shown a very meaningful distinction. Some people working in politics see the immediate problems—money, land, things—and are happy with just solving those problems. But political actors who have faith look to God and ask how God is viewing those immediate problems that today's politicians are trying to solve. The problems should not be seen separately from God's perspective. From beginning to end God moves his project through history, and to be effective, the solution to any problem must coincide with that perspective of God.

That perspective of God is revealed in the words that have been read today from the Bible. First, we must recognize God as the protagonist of history; second, we must start from redemption from sin; and third, we must not neglect Christ, who is the way and the goal of all true liberation. Here in today's reading we find a statement of the project that we have been studying through all of Lent.

Today's first reading makes it clear that it is God who takes the initiative. When God talks about «the people I have formed for myself», he is talking about Israel: «I have chosen you, and I am creating your history» (Isa 43:21). Marvelous is that moment when human beings realize that they are simply instruments of God. They live as long as God wants them to live; they can do as much as God wants them to do; they are as intelligent as God wants them to be. We must place all our limitations in the hands of God and recognize that without God we can do nothing. In this way, dear sisters and brothers, we see the transcendence of the present time in El Salvador, and we pray hard, closely united with God. Indeed, there are people who are working for liberation just by uniting themselves with God.

The other day we were talking about the problem of providing refuge and about how a refuge should not be confused with a lodging. A refuge is for people who come fleeing in fear and are seeking a place to hide. «Ah, but many of us are organized, and we cannot be idle. We have to work!» Fine, then go and work; find some lodging and work. But the refuge is a place where even the sick are working. Take the case of that father with his sick wife and his children; they were sent to occupy a church, but how can they if they are sick? Let them offer their pain and their suffering; there is value in that. But when we lose sight of the transcendence of the struggle, we end up doing things that are often erroneous. Let us hope that all those who are now working for the liberation of the people realize that without God nothing is possible and that with God even the smallest effort is helpful when it is done with good will. (Applause)

In today's first reading God invites the people of Israel to discover his hand at work not only in their leaving Egypt for the Promised Land but also in their return to Jerusalem from Babylon. Transcendence involves discovering the hand of God at work in the historical journey of the people. That is why I keep repeating: those who are working for the liberation of the people should never lose sight of this transcendent dimension.

The second thing I say is that we must understand how liberation can free us from sin. We must take into account that all evils have a common root, which is sin. The human heart is filled with selfishness, envy, and idolatry, and these evils give rise to division and domination. Christ told us, «It is not what comes out of people that defiles them; it is what is within the human heart» (Matt 15:18-19). There are evil thoughts that are the source of slavery, and they need to be purified. Why is there slavery? Why is there exclusion? Why is there illiteracy? Why are there infirmities? Why are there people groaning in pain? All those things are denouncing the existence of sin, as Medellín said, «Poverty is a denunciation of the injustice of that people» (M 14, 4).

Therefore, the transcendence of liberation must start with sin. The church is always preaching, «Repent of your personal sins», but she will also tell people, as Jesus told the adulterous woman, «I do not condemn you. You have repented, so sin no more» (John 8:11). Sin is always something evil, sisters and brothers. Those of you who place little importance on intimate relations with God, how I would like to impress on you their importance! It is not enough to say, «I am an atheist», «I don't believe in God», or «I don't offend him». It's not a question of your belief. The fact is that you have broken off relations with the principle of all life. As long as you fail to discover God and follow him and love him, you are disconnected from your origin and so bear within yourselves disorder, disunity, ingratitude, faithlessness, and hostility. Without God a true conception of liberation is impossible. There may well be some short-term form of liberation, but only people of faith will bring about a solid, definitive kind of liberation.

My third point, therefore, is that this transcendence requires that we have great faith in Jesus Christ. Saint Paul's words in this regard are unsurpassed. He was a sinner who had forgotten Christ, or better said, he did not know Christ and thought that Christ and his Christians were traitors to the true religion, which was Judaism. He felt called to pursue and arrest the Christians in order to do away with that sect. But when Christ appeared to him and revealed to him who he was, Paul became aware of his ignorance, and so he could write, «I consider everything loss in comparison to the surpassing knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord» (Phil 3:8a). He manifests the gratitude of a sinner when he confesses, «I did not know you,

Lord, but now I have known you, and now everything seems to me useless in comparison with the wonder of knowing you, my Lord». He continues, «For Christ I lost everything, but I consider it all rubbish for the sake of gaining Christ and existing in him, not with any justice of my own but with the justice that comes from faith in Christ» (Phil 3:8b-9). This is transcendence! There are many people who want justice, personal justice, human justice, but they are not transcending. What saves us, says Saint Paul, is «the justice that come from faith in Christ, my Lord» (Phil 3:9).

How then is Christ justice for humankind? Paul states, «My desire is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, and to share in his sufferings by dying as he died in order one day to be raised from the dead» (Phil 3:10-11). Do you see how our life recovers all its meaning, how our suffering is communion with the suffering Christ, and how our death is communion with the death that redeemed the world? Who can feel useless while possessing the treasure of finding Christ, the one who gives meaning to sickness, suffering, oppression, torture, and marginalization? No one suffers defeat, even when crushed beneath the heel of oppression and repression. Those who believe in Christ know that they are victors and that the definitive victory will be that of truth and justice. (Applause)

In that same intimate passage Saint Paul says, «I have not yet won the prize, but I keep running forward, giving no thought to what lies behind me and striving for what lies ahead. I am running toward the goal to win the exalted prize to which God calls me in Christ Jesus» (Phil 3:13-14). This is transcendence: a goal toward which we want to orient all our liberation, a goal that brings complete joy to all people.

Life of the church

This is the liberation, sisters and brothers, that our church must practice and preach. It is what the word of God has taught us as we are about to enter into Holy Week and strengthen ourselves as church and as God's people. At this moment I am speaking to my beloved priests, religious communities, Christian communities, everything called church and people of God. May this firm core of believers have strength that is like the strength that God gave Israel to bring light to all the other nations, to expose and condemn all that is evil, and to encourage all that is good. At this point of my homily, then, I make mention of the activities of our church, and I invite all of you who are active in the church to make her truly an engine of liberation, just as God's project desires.

My first announcement is that next Sunday we will begin Holy Week, and because of the special circumstances we will celebrate it here in the basilica. Next Sunday at eight o'clock in the morning we will have the blessing of palms. We will do it jointly with the church of El Calvario, and since that is the case, I'm asking you to be at El Calvario at seven-thirty. There we will bless the palms and then come in procession to the basilica, signifying the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The Palm Sunday Mass will be celebrated in the basilica. The other ceremonies appear in the program. On Holy Thursday the blessing of oils will be at ten in the morning, but we will announce all this again next Sunday. I only want to tell you right now that we would like the Way of the Cross on Good Friday to be done in a spirit of reparation, denunciation, and solidarity. Christians should be meditating on the passion of Christ in our people, for they are also carrying a heavy cross. Next Sunday we will give more details about the celebration of a great Way of the Cross which will truly be an expression of solidarity with the Way of the Cross of our people.

Regarding the communities, last Sunday I mentioned the celebrations for the feast of Saint Joseph. These were especially fervent in San José de la Montaña and in the seminaries under his patronage. The feast was celebrated also in San José Cortez, San José Villanueva, the Externado San José, and the Colegio Cristóbal Colón, which is run by the Josephite Fathers.

In Aguilares we celebrated the third anniversary of the assassination of Father Grande. It was obvious that the repression is having its effect: there were few people, and there was much fear. The zone is undergoing real martyrdom. In my homily I told them that the message of Christ must inevitably encounter what Father Grande encountered if we are to keep faith with it.

We celebrated the patronal feast in the village of Los Martínez in Tejutla, and the people there made a frightful denunciation. Around midnight on March 7 a truck filled with soldiers arrived; some were in uniform and some in civilian dress. They forcibly entered a house and violently removed everyone in the family, kicking them and beating them with their rifles. They raped four young women, savagely beat the parents, and warned them that they would suffer the consequences if they said anything. We have learned about the tragedy of the poor girls.

We also had a wonderful confirmation celebration in Agua Caliente, a very pleasant village in the parish of La Reina in the department of Chalatenango.

In Cojutepeque the pastor, Father Richard Ayala, has been the victim of a false accusation. Our office received the following telegram, which is a copy of a telegram sent by the head of the National Police to the head of the military supreme command, «I herewith transcribe a radio communication proceeding on this date from the National Guard in Cojutepeque: As the commander director of the National Police, I communicate that this office has received information that last weekend the priest Ricardo Ayala, pastor of the church of San Sebastián, met with a group of men and women in San Andrés, situated in Monte San Juan in this department, and that he told them that on the fifteenth of this month he would leave for Nicaragua or Cuba to bring reinforcements to continue the struggle in our country». It is signed by the commander. This is ridiculous, isn't it? When we called Father Ayala, whom many of you know as a serious person, he wrote the following to Mr. Duarte, who was the one who had sent the telegram to our office: «About this allegation let me tell you: first, it is true that on that date I was in the villages of El Carmen and Soledad, in the district of Monte San Juan, accompanied by the priest Benjamín Rodríguez, pastor of that area; second, the purpose of our visit was to console and reconcile people on both sides by imparting religious, evangelical counsel; third, it is completely false and tendentious to state that we proposed leaving the country on the fifteenth of this month to bring reinforcements from other countries to continue the struggle. That is not the language we use, nor is it that pastoral mission that has been entrusted to us. Sincerely, Father Ayala». (Applause)

In Candelaria, another community in the department of Cuscatlán, the people have condemned the repressive actions of «the National Guard in the villages of San Miguel Nance Verde and San Juan Miraflores Arriba, part of the jurisdiction of Candelaria, Cuscatlán». The denunciation reads:

First, one afternoon the young reservist Emilio Mejía was captured when he was traveling with other persons toward Cojutepeque. He was taken to his own village, San

José de la Ceiba, and on the same afternoon was killed in front of the house of Don Salvador Mejía. The next morning his mother, Doña Carmen Martínez de Mejía, claimed his body and buried him that afternoon. (It is said that this happened by mistake; they were looking for another person with the same name. A fatal mistake!)

Second, the other Emilio Mejía¹ was captured in his own house in the village of San Juan Miraflores Arriba, in the presence of his wife, Doña Pilar Raymundo de Mejía. He was beaten and dragged from the house. The next day his wife found him about two blocks away, decapitated.

Third, in the village of San Miguel Nance Verde, José Cupertino Alvarado and his daughters, Carmen Alvarado and María Josefa Alvarado, were captured in their own house and were later found dead in a coffee grove behind the chapel of the village of San Juan Miraflores Arriba. They were buried in a common grave the following day by their family.

Fourth, it is clear that all those killed, except the first, were captured while peacefully residing in their homes; they offered no resistance. The undersigned saw a military truck with National Guard troops parked that afternoon in front of the ANTEL offices.

This denunciation offers an excellent juridical analysis, making it quite clear that the assaults were committed not only against lives but against the law. In one of its paragraphs it states, «In this present statement I am not defending anarchist or subversive ideologies, should it be true that the persons killed were accused of such things. I am simply submitting that these actions were outside the law and in complete contradiction to the dignity of human persons».

In response to our complaint about the raid on the house of the Belgian priests in the Colonia Zacamil, the Ministry of Defense has said this: «As regards the raid on said house, I would ask you to consider the following details. First, there was no sign that identified it as a house of priests or a place of religious worship. Second, the raid involved not only that house but the whole neighborhood, about which we had also received reports that merited investigation». When it says «also received», it means they had reports about the priests as well. It continues, «Third, as soon as it became evident that the house belonged to the priests and that there was nothing in it that aroused suspicion, the search was suspended. Fourth, it is possible that sometime after the search other persons entered the house with the intention of causing damage or making it appear that the search was violent. I want to make it clear that, when the National Guard was asked about the incident, they did not deny that the search was carried out. The Ministry has therefore ordered that more care and respect be shown with respect to special cases such as this one and that that there be consultation before any action is taken». Let us hope that the deeds don't contradict this.

Continuing to inform you about the life of our diocese: in Calle Real, Ciudad Delgado, we will have confirmations this afternoon at four o'clock. The catechumenal communities celebrated their Easter service this week. A new Christian center is opening in Soyapango, to be directed by the Dominican Fathers of El Rosario. The ecclesial base community in Santa Tecla is studying our pastoral method and following it ever more closely.

A new parish has been created in Chalatenango. The parish of Cristo Rey will include El Paraíso, Aldeita, and the town of Chalatenango. The pastor will be Father Gabriel Rodríguez,

¹ The other person with the same name as the man mentioned in the previous paragraph.

and he'll have the collaboration of four major seminarians who will spend one year there as deacons in preparation for priestly ordination.

The educational communities are also developing pastoral programs for the Catholic schools. This gives us great hope that the work in the schools will not run parallel, much less opposed, to the pastoral approach of the diocese. We had meetings with the lay staff at La Asunción, and we'll also be meeting with the staff of the Colegio Sagrado Corazón.

Two diocesan organizations are providing staff formation. The pastoral council, with its new vicars, spent two days this week studying the pastoral project of the archdiocese. Be aware of this so that you won't be shocked by misinformed reports. Our archdiocesan pastoral project corresponds to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, the bishops' meetings at Medellín and Puebla, and the Pastoral Weeks that were held in our archdiocese. Please keep this fact in mind so that you're not surprised by false information. I don't like it when people talk about «the archbishop's approach». I don't have any personal approach. I am simply trying to follow the approach of those great church events. I am happy that the pastoral commission is studying this diocesan project that I received as a precious inheritance from Archbishop Chávez. We are still trying to put the project into practice, and we've had great success in the communities where they take it seriously. Also, the priests' senate elected a new board; this is an organization that serves all the priests and the diocese as a whole.

We send our special thanks to Father Pick and his collaborators, who worked so hard to get this radio station YSAX back into operation so that those of you who are far away can now hear us. (Applause)

So that you can see that the gesture of our fellow Christians from North America is not an isolated action, they have informed me that many Christian groups have expressed their solidarity with the letter we sent to the president of the United States and have supported our desire that no more military aid be given for the repression of our people. (Applause) One testimony of solidarity is an article signed by Mr. Murat Williams, who was the United States ambassador here in El Salvador during the time of President Rivera. Drawing on his own experience, he confirms our contention that the assistance given by the United States always contributes to military repression here in El Salvador. (Applause)

Since there may be confusion about two different events, our information office has prepared two clarifications: The first one concerns the policeman tortured in the cathedral. The official version is ambiguous about the role of the archdiocese since it states that they appealed to the archdiocese and got no response². That phrasing is dangerous because we never refuse to do what we have to do, and we do what we can. Our bulletin therefore offers this explanation:

On March 21 members of the FAPU asked the archdiocese to help them with the burial of the seventeen bodies they had in the cathedral because they were afraid of being repressed in the street on the way to the cemetery. For that reason they felt obliged to bury them in the cathedral. The archdiocese promised to obtain guarantees for the burial procession, and it did so through the Ministry of Defense, which was quite concerned about the case and invited the participation of the International Red Cross

² «Comunicado del Comité de Prensa de las Fuerzas Armadas» in *El Diario de Hoy* (23 March 1980).

and the Ministry of Public Health. The arrangements made by the archdiocese were communicated to the representatives of the FAPU and the BPR, but they disagreed among themselves. Some agreed to carry the bodies to the cemetery while others said that they should be buried in the cathedral. The representatives of the archdiocese and the International Red Cross told them that they would collaborate in a normal burial but would not support the protest demonstration that the organizations also wanted to organize. While these arrangements were being made, the director of the National Police, Colonel Reynaldo López Nuila, phoned to ask for the intervention of the archdiocese so that those occupying the cathedral would release Corporal Miguel Ángel Zuñiga, whom the occupiers had captured. The archbishop immediately sent a delegate to the cathedral, but the occupiers paid him no heed and denied that they had Corporal Zuñiga there. Later the archdiocesan representative and a member of Legal Aid went to the University of El Salvador to speak with the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses. There they were informed that it was true that the corporal had been captured but that he had already been released. They also talked with representatives of the International Red Cross about the burial of the bodies. The decision emerging from this dialogue was that the BPR would bury its members in the cemetery and the FAPU would bury theirs in the cathedral.

Second, a commission of priests and laypersons went to the military hospital to speak with Corporal Miguel Ángel Zuñiga, who stated that, while walking in front of the cathedral, four men armed with machine guns accosted him and led him into the cathedral. They took him down to the basement, where they beat him and placed iron rings on his wrists and hands. They applied electric shocks and beat him on the ears and in the stomach so that he would tell them the names of his superiors and his companions, as well as the number of vehicles they had. All this information would be taken to the national university. One of his interrogators sprayed his eyes with a liquid that smelled of sulfur and that caused great pain and burning. They told him that if he didn't collaborate they would treat him the same way the people of San Martín were treated and that they would kill his mother. They put a pistol to his head. He swore by God and by his mother that he had never tortured or caused harm to anyone. Finally, they put him out on the street, where he caught a taxi. The doctor who attended him in the hospital stated that for the moment the corporal could not see but that they hoped he would recover his sight. He is unable to move two fingers because of the electric shocks applied.

This is the case of the police officer. In no way do we approve of such cruel behavior. The human person stands above our normal ways of thinking and must be respected.

The other case we want to clarify is the following. The Catholic Church has opened the doors of four of her properties to protect refugees who have fled their homes for fear of the violence afflicting many parts of the country. Our church is fully aware that one of her principal obligations is offering protection and charity to those who are suffering, without regard to creed, politics, or ideology. The church is willing to help any human person. In this concrete case, the church has opened four sites as places of refuge and not as centers for any kind of political indoctrination, much less as camps for military training which, far from protecting the people, would expose them to danger. The church has therefore asked the people's organizations to respect the function these sites have been given, which is strictly that of being places of refuge. The military authorities have been likewise informed. The church is undertaking this humanitarian work through Caritas, which is the official organization by

which the archdiocese offers this type of service. Apart from Caritas, the church does not recognize any other organization in carrying out her official charitable action. Let it be quite clear, then, that Caritas alone represents the archdiocese in these works of benevolent aid and charity. Of course, Caritas is a member of the Ecumenical Humanitarian Aid Commission, which includes, at the ecumenical level, other organizations that have social concerns. However, these do not represent the Catholic Church, which is represented only by Caritas. The archdiocese wants to make it clear that its actions are in keeping with its humanitarian and Christian work. If its initiatives have not achieved all the results desired, it is not because of inertia but because of the lack of the needed understanding and collaboration.

We have one pleasant note from the life of our diocese. A well-known composer and poet³ has written a beautiful hymn for our Divine Savior, and we'll soon have it published: «As riotous songs resound with joy / I'm going to join my people in the cathedral. / With thousands of voices we unite this day / to sing on this feast of our Patron». There follow other stanzas expressing the sentiments of the people. The last one is very beautiful: «But the gods of power and wealth / are opposed to any transfiguration. / Therefore you are the first, O Lord, / to raise your arm against oppression».

I have here some texts from the pope that confirm the doctrine we're preaching, but we won't read them now. The most important thing for him is giving priority to the human person.

Events of the week

Now, then, I invite you to look at our situation from the perspective of this church which is trying to be the kingdom of God on earth and which therefore must shed light on the realities around us.

We have lived through a tremendously tragic week. Last Sunday I couldn't give you information about what had happened the Saturday before, March 15, but it involved one of the largest and most disastrous military operations in the rural areas. The places most affected were La Laguna, Plan de Ocotes, and El Rosario. The tragic aftermath of the operation was many homes burned, widespread looting, and what is inevitable: many corpses.

In La Laguna they killed the couple Ernesto Navas and Audelia Mejia de Navas and their children: Martin, age thirteen, and Hilda, age seven. They also killed eleven other *campesinos*. The people of Plan de Ocotes have reported, without giving names, that four *campesinos* and two children were killed, including two women. In El Rosario three more *campesinos* were killed. That was on Saturday.

Last Sunday in Arcatao four members of ORDEN killed the *campesino* Vicente Ayala, age 24, and his son, Freddy; they also killed the *campesino* Marcelino Serrano. That same day in the village of Calera, Jutiapa, the *campesino* Fernando Hernández Navarro was killed when he fled from a military operation.

March 17, last Monday, was a tremendously violent day. A number of bombs were exploded in the capital and elsewhere in the country. The damage to the offices of the Ministry of Agriculture was considerable. The campus of the national university was cordoned off by the

³ Guillermo Cuéllar, author of the *Misa popular salvadoreña*.

military from early morning until seven at night. Bursts of machine-gun fire were heard in the zone around the university all day long. The archdiocese intervened to protect the persons who were inside the cordon.

Eighteen persons died at the Colima estate; at least fifteen of them were *campesinos*⁴. The administrator and the supply manager also died. The Armed Forces state that there was a confrontation. On television they presented their version of the events, and there were many things worthy of analysis.

At least fifty persons died in the tragic events of that day⁵. In the capital, seven persons died in the incidents in the Colonia Santa Lucia and five more near Tecnillantas. After the people in that place had been routed by military force, the bodies of four of the workers captured during the eviction were found in the rubbish disposal area. In the village of Montepeque, at kilometer thirty-eight on the highway to Suchitoto, sixteen *campesinos* were killed⁶. That same day two brothers, students at the UCA, were captured at Tecnillantas: Mario Nelson and Miguel Alberto Rodríguez Velado. Mario, after being detained illegally for four days, went before the courts. That was not the case with his brother, who was wounded and is still being illegally detained. Legal Aid has undertaken his defense.

Amnesty International issued a press release describing the repression of *campesinos*, especially in the zone of Chalatenango⁷. The events of this week confirm this report despite the government's denials⁸. As I was entering the church, they gave me a cable which reads as follow:

Amnesty International confirmed Saturday [yesterday] that human rights are being violated in El Salvador to extremes that are not seen in other countries. This was affirmed in a press conference in this capital [Managua] by Patricio Fuentes, spokesman of the Special Action for Central America project of Amnesty in Sweden. Fuentes stated that, during two weeks of research carried out in El Salvador, he found evidence of eighty-three political murders between March 10 and March 14. He pointed out that Amnesty International had recently condemned the government of El Salvador, alleging that it was responsible for six hundred political assassinations. [Applause] The Salvadoran government defended itself against the charges, arguing that Amnesty based its condemnation on unproved assumptions. Now we have proof, said Fuentes, that human rights are being violated in El Salvador in an even more repressive way than was the case after the coup d'état in Chile. The Salvadoran government also said that the six hundred dead were the result of armed confrontations between army troops and guerrillas. Fuentes said that during his stay in El Salvador he could see evidence of torture being used against the victims before and after the killings. The spokesman of Amnesty said that the victims' bodies typically appeared with the thumbs tied behind their backs. Corrosive liquids were also applied to the corpses to prevent identification of the victims by their relatives and to avoid international condemnation, the spokesman added. Nevertheless, the persons killed have been identified after exhumation of their corpses. Fuentes said that the repression being carried out by the

⁴ *El Diario de Hoy* (18 March 1980).

⁵ *El Mundo* (18 March 1980).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica* (19 March 1980).

Salvadoran army was aimed at dismantling the people's organizations by assassination of their leaders in both the city and the countryside. In the rural areas, said the Amnesty spokesman, at least thirty-five hundred *campesinos* have fled from their places of origin toward the capital in order to escape the persecution. In London and Sweden we have complete lists of children, youths, and women who have been killed just for joining organizations, stated Fuentes. He then stated that Amnesty International, which is a humanitarian organization, does not identify with governments, organizations, or persons. «We do not seek change of government, but we do fight for human rights to be respected in all parts of the world, especially where they are most threatened and assailed, said Fuentes». (Applause)

This report confirms, then, what we've been recounting about this frightful week.

Looking especially at the seventeenth, an extremely violent day, I want to analyze what was perhaps the cause of all that violence, namely, the strike called by the Revolutionary Coordinator of the Masses. The aim of the strike was to protest against the repression, and last Sunday I told you that that was a legitimate objective. They were denouncing a reality that is intolerable. However, the strike also had a political objective, which was to demonstrate that the repression was strengthening the people's organizations instead of intimidating them. It was also meant to make clear the Coordinator movement's rejection of the present position of the government, which has to use violent repression to carry out its reforms since various aspects of the reforms are not acceptable to the people's organizations. The state of siege and the disinformation to which we are being subjected, both in official communiqués and in most of our mass media⁹, prevent us from getting an objective measure of the extent of the national strike. Foreign radio stations have spoken about a seventy percent stoppage, which would certainly be a very high percentage and could be considered a notable triumph. Even apart from the establishments that closed because they feared the actions of leftists or the attacks carried out by the right and the government early on Monday morning, it cannot be denied that the Coordinator movement has demonstrated the tremendous strength it has among the forces of labor. The Coordinator movement is strong not only in the countryside but in the factories and in the city.

Quite likely errors were committed, but despite all the faults we consider the strike to be an advance in the people's struggle. It demonstrated that the left is able to paralyze the economic activity of the country. (Applause)

The government's response to the strike was very harsh. This could be seen not only in the patrols around the city and the gun attack on the University of El Salvador, but above all in the deaths that resulted. No fewer than ten workers were killed by agents of the security forces in one factory on strike. Even in the mayor's office, three workers appeared dead after they had been detained by agents of the Finance Police. This is a clear reason for denouncing the administration of the city itself. (Applause)

Other deaths were added to these that same day, finally reaching at least sixty according to some, while others say they surpassed one hundred forty. What happened was that, besides the labor strike, some people's organizations carried out armed actions in the countryside. That was the case in Colima, San Martín, and Suchitoto. One can question the tactical prudence

⁹ *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica* (18 March 1980) and *El Mundo* (17 March 1980).

of those operations by the people's organizations, but their possible indiscretion did not justify the government's repressive action.

Certainly the Coordinator movement has its faults, and it still has a long way to go before becoming a coherent alternative of revolutionary democratic power. Let us hope that they evaluate and continue to improve on what has truly been an expression of the people. If instead they act foolishly, they will be repudiated by the same people. If they mature and develop a true understanding of the desires of the people, they provide hope for a solution. Their faults are not due to their being subversive or malevolent or social malcontents. Their faults result from their not being allowed normal political development. They are persecuted and massacred, and they are hindered in their organizing work and in their attempts to extend their relations with other democratic groups. The persecution drives them toward radicalization and desperation, and in such circumstances they are tempted to engage in revolutionary activities and armed struggles.

The very least that can be said is that the country is in a pre-revolutionary stage, which is in no way a stage of transition. The basic question is how to emerge from this critical stage with the least possible violence. The greatest responsibility in this regard lies with those in government: the civilians and above all the military officers. Let us hope that they are not blinded by what they're doing in agrarian reform. That can deceive them and prevent them from seeing the wider problem.

We continue to review this week that was so loaded with events that must be recounted. News items about the pope say that he also was reporting on the number of victims that there have been these days in Italy and especially in Rome¹⁰. That means that if the pope were in my place, not only would he point out the ten cruel murders in Italy, but he would take time, as we are doing now, to recount day by day the numerous killings here.

On Tuesday, March 18, the bodies of four *campesinos* were found in different zones: two in Metapán and two in San Miguel.

On Wednesday, March 19, at five-thirty in the morning there was a military operation in San Luis La Loma, La Cayetana, León de Piedra, La India, Paz, Opico, and El Mono, after which the bodies of three *campesinos* were found: Humberto Urbino, Oswaldo Hernández, and Francisco García. At two o'clock, in the capital, the offices of the Beverage Workers Union and those of the Revolutionary Trade Union Federation were occupied by the military while many workers were paying their respects to the body of Manuel Pacín, who had worked as an advisor to municipal employees and whose body was found in Apulo after his arrest. During the occupation two persons were killed, one of whom was the worker Mauricio Barrera, a leader of the Mechanical and Metal Workers Union. Nineteen workers were brought before the courts. Legal Aid has intervened in these cases at the request of the workers' families. According to the national press, the Armed Forces reported that nine *campesinos* died in a confrontation in the village of San Bartolo, Tecolula¹¹. At noon, in the village of El Almendral in the jurisdiction of Majagual, La Libertad, army soldiers captured the *campesinos* Miguel Ángel Gómez de Paz, Concepción Coralia Menjívar, and José Emilio Valencia, and they have not been released. We ask that they be brought before the courts.

¹⁰ «Words of John Paul II After the Angelus on Sunday, 16 March 1980» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 March 1980).

¹¹ *El Mundo* (20 March 1980).

At four o'clock on Thursday, March 20, in the village of El Jocote, Quezaltepeque, *campesino* leader Alfonso Muñoz Pacheco was killed. As secretary of conflicts for the Federation of Rural Workers, he was widely known in the countryside for his dedication to the cause of *campesinos*.

It is important to note that another very horrifying thing happened that same Thursday the twentieth. The *campesino* Agustín Sánchez, who had been captured by soldiers in Zacatecoluca and handed over to the Finance Police, was found alive. In a declaration notarized before witnesses, Sánchez has stated that his capture took place in the El Cauca estate in the department of La Paz while he was working in association with the Salvadoran Communal Union. They held him without food or water for four days, and they tortured him constantly with lashes and suffocation. Finally, on March 19 he was shot in the head along with two other companions, but by luck the bullet destroyed only his right eye and cheekbone. Early in the morning he was found in a moribund state by some *campesinos*, who attended to him until a person of confidence could transport him to the capital. The *campesino* was unable to sign this horrifying testimony because both of his hands are smashed. Highly respected persons witnessed this terrible situation, and there is photographic evidence that reveals the state in which they found this poor *campesino*.

Earlier we had unconfirmed information regarding the massive death of twenty-five *campesinos* in San Pablo Tacachico. At the last minute, just as Mass was beginning, confirmation of this terrible tragedy arrived. It states that starting at six o'clock in the morning of Friday, March 21, a military operation was conducted on the road between Santa Ana and San Pablo Tacachico. This operation was carried out by soldiers from the bases at Opico and Santa Ana in coordination with the Financial Police stationed in Tacachico. The soldiers had a list of the names of the persons to be captured. During the operation they carried out raids in the villages of El Resbaladero, San Felipe, Moncagua, El Portillo, San José La Cueva, Mogotes, and in the districts of Los Pozos and Las Delicias. They also searched everyone who was walking on foot or traveling by bus. The repression was crueler still in the village of Mogotes in the jurisdiction of Tacachico, where the soldiers had two tanks that sowed terror among the inhabitants of that zone. In the course of the raids they stole four radios and 400 *colones* in cash; they burned the house and all the belonging of Rosalío Cruz, who along with his family has been left in abject misery. They killed Alejandro Mojica and Félix Santos, the first in his home and the second in a dry creek. Both leave a spouse and children in dire straits. They were buried on their own lots for fear for repression. The troops also carried off Isabel Cruz, Manuel Santos, and Santos Urquilla to an undisclosed location.

There is one final report that especially calls for our solidarity. Yesterday afternoon the UCA, the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas, was attacked for the first time and with no provocation. At one-fifteen in the afternoon a large military force mounted this operation, together with the National Police. They entered the campus and began shooting. A student who at the time was studying mathematics, Manuel Orantes Guillén, was killed. They also tell me that the troops captured and disappeared several students. Their families and the UCA are protesting the raid on the campus, which should be respected for its autonomy. They have done at the UCA what they have not yet done at the national university, no doubt out of fear. It is evident that the UCA is not armed to defend itself and that the assault was carried out with no justification. We hope to give more details later about this attack, which is a serious offense against civilization and the rule of law in our country.

Dear sisters and brothers, I don't want to take advantage of your time, but it would be interesting to analyze now the meaning of what has happened during these first few months of a new government which was supposed to deliver us from these horrible situations. If their intention is to decapitate the people's organizations and to thwart the process that the people want, then no other process can move forward. Without sinking roots into the people, no government can be effective, especially if it wants to impose itself through bloodshed and pain. (Applause)

I would like to make an appeal especially to the men of the army, and concretely to the National Guard, the police, and the troops. Brothers, you are of part of our own people. You are killing your own brother and sister *campesinos*, and against any order a man may give to kill, God's law must prevail: «You shall not kill!» (Ex 20:13). (Applause) No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God. (Applause) No one has to observe an immoral law. (Applause) It is time now for you to reclaim your conscience and to obey your conscience rather than the command to sin. (Applause) The church defends the rights of God, the law of God, and the dignity of the human person and therefore cannot remain silent before such great abominations. We want the government to understand well that the reforms are worth nothing if they are stained with so much blood. (Applause) In the name of God, then, and in the name of this suffering people, whose laments rise up each day more tumultuously toward heaven, I beg you, I beseech you, I order you in the name of God: stop the repression! (Applause)

The liberation the church preaches is just as we have studied it today in the holy Bible. It is a liberation that respects above all the dignity of the person, the saving power of the common good of the people, and the transcendent vision that looks first of all toward God and derives its hope and its strength from God alone. Let us now proclaim our faith in this truth. (Applause)