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THE MISSIONARY, SPIRITUAL, AND SOCIAL DYNAMISM OF GOD'S KINGDOM IN HIS CHURCH

Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time

20 August 1978

Isaiah 56:1, 6-7

Romans 11:13-15, 29-32

Matthew 15:21-28

It's a wonderful thing to feel ourselves to be sisters and brothers each Sunday, especially in these moments of family togetherness. We are God's pilgrim family on earth, and each Sunday we come together for mutual sharing, just as on weekends people who are dispersed in their labors during the week unite together with their parents and other family members. We come together feeling that what each one of us does is of interest to all of us, and so we unite together in a single force of love, faith, and hope in the middle of a world that presents us with countless difficulties. In this family setting we are guided by the Father, the one whom we'll soon address as «our Father». It is he who speaks to us, and the priest or bishop who preaches is simply his messenger, chosen from the same family to communicate his divine message.

This message has been organized in the course of the liturgical year in such a way that every Sunday offers something new; we are presented with different aspects of this marvelous family called «church», the beginning of God's kingdom on earth. How can the church be anything but marvelous if she is bringing to us the kingdom of God, even if that kingdom is still entangled in the limitations and imperfections of those of us who try to give it form? Nevertheless, we keep trying to make ourselves less unworthy of that fullness of life that God wants to share with us when our pilgrimage comes to an end.

And so as usual I sum up the message that the divine word offers us this Sunday with this thought: «The Missionary, Spiritual, and Social Dynamism of God's Kingdom in His Church». These will be the three aspects of today's homily: the church has a missionary dynamism, the church has a spiritual dynamism, and the church has a social dynamism here on earth.

News and notices about the life of the church

But before entering into this reflection on the word, I want to describe the concrete situation of our church, which is revealed in a great variety of ways in our archdiocese. To this end I want to present some news and notices about the life of our church. At the end of the homily, when I speak of the church's social dynamism, I'll present the aspects that are not strictly church-related but have to do with the political and economic aspects of the lives of our people in our present history. These aspects are by no means irrelevant; indeed, this dynamic church of ours must shed light on them. But first comes *being*, philosophy tells us. First, a thing must *be*, and only then can it *act*. The church's main labor is above all *being* or *being built*.

I always urge you, dear sisters and brothers, to seek in my poor speech this purpose above all. I am not trying to confront anyone. I am not fighting with anyone. I am helping Christ to build his church, and so I'm calling on all of you who are baptized, who are church, to become fully aware and to collaborate in making this pilgrim people a torch that truly enlightens the world. That's why no one should hear my words with a polemical spirit. I don't pretend to be the opposition, as someone said to me this week. I want to be simply affirmation. When a man says yes to his convictions, he's not confronting others; he is simply making a statement. Naturally, there'll be others who don't think the way he does, and then comes the confrontation, but it's not that he's seeking it.

Like everywhere else in the world, the church being built up in our archdiocese is experiencing moments of solemn expectation that should be devoted to profound prayer. We are feeling the absence of Paul VI, and we feel love for his successor even without knowing him. This is the faith of the church. What a marvelous thing! Doesn't it seem to you that this is an extraordinary miracle? When there is so much confusion, so many intrigues and interests, the church suddenly finds herself without a leader, but this lack is resolved through hope. No one is fighting to be pope. There are no parties, no intrigues; there is simply a faith that hopes. Send us, Lord, the one you are to send! This should be a week of intense prayer. As you've already been informed, on the twenty-fifth the cardinals who are going to choose the new pontiff will convene. We don't know what strategies and practices they'll use in choosing the man that our times require. Some theologians have already given us a marvelous clue: it has to be a man of the church, a man of great faith, a man profoundly ecclesial, and therefore also a man who represents a church open to dialogue with the world. What a marvelous balance of qualities!

So much evil is being done at this time by pastors and close-minded Catholics, people who think that the only truth is the truth they possess! They forget that no one owns the truth. Only God is truth, and even if the infallible God who cannot err has transmitted to his church this gift of infallibility—whose organ of expression is the pope—still it is not exclusively the pope who is infallible. It is the whole people of God that speaks through one mouthpiece, just as the whole human organism speaks in words that issue from a single mouth. We should acknowledge this gift of the Spirit with gratitude and respect, for it is through this gift that we are all in communion with God's truth even when we express the truth in diverse ways. What others say may be disagreeable to my way of thinking, but they are within the scope of the truth and deserve respect. This is what is called openness and understanding; it doesn't mean that there's room for every error along with the truth, but it makes room for the truth in its multiple facets. The truth must be firm enough to allow for pluralism but also to exclude error, heresy, and falsehood. Let us be open-minded, sisters and brothers, in understanding what to expect of our new pontiff. He must be above all a man of ecclesial communion.

Many people are also wondering, «We, the church of this continent, are preparing for a very important event, the meeting of the bishops in Puebla. What does the pope's death mean in the midst of these preparations for Puebla?» Until now the path we've followed has been correct, and we can continue on it, but in order for a meeting of the bishops of a particular region to have hierarchical validity in communion with the pope, it is the pope who must convoke it, and it is the pope who must preside either personally or through a representative. Now it was Paul VI who convoked the Latin American bishops for the Puebla meeting; naturally, he can't preside because he died. The new pope can and should ratify the convocation of Paul VI to give it validity, and he should come either to preside over it or send

someone to represent him as president so that the bishops are in communion with Peter. Therefore, Puebla will go forward but always under the guidance of the new pope. Let us also pray hard for this event.

Within our intimate life as archdiocesan church, I ask you to pardon me, sisters and brothers, for speaking personally and voicing a profound vote of thanks for the many expressions of solidarity that the communities and individuals have sent on the occasion of my birthday. I especially thank all the clergy who were at the luncheon at Domus Mariae, where we had the pleasure of shaking hands with Bishop Chávez. And I was overcome with consolation at the Mass that evening, at which many people and many communities of our archdiocese were present. May God reward you all!

Since our pilgrim church is in community, I offer you here some news of our ecclesial communities. At a Mass last Sunday we concluded a mission preached by Father Luis in the sector of Zacamil called San Ramón. A new community was born. On the evening of Wednesday the sixteenth, the patronal feast of the San Jacinto neighborhood, which is under the care of the Vincentian fathers, we confirmed a fine group of young men and women. How wonderful confirmation is when the young people are prepared! Today we'll have another confirmation group in the parish of San Juan Cojutepeque, where Father Brizuela has also understood the rich depths of this sacrament. I ask you all to help me give proper value to this sacrament, sisters and brothers, so that we don't confer it on children who don't appreciate it but on young people who are becoming aware of the need for new strength in their adolescence, the strength the Spirit gives in confirmation.

This Thursday there will be a very significant religious celebration in Arcatao. The Guadalupana Sisters, who work zealously and devotedly in that distant district, are preparing to celebrate the feast day of Saint Bartholomew on Thursday of this week. I will have the good fortune of taking part in the event, but even now I wish them much success. Another community, that of the parish of Tejutla, will celebrate next Saturday at ten o'clock the first anniversary of the assassination of the catechist Felipe de Jesús, whom we all remember with great admiration and affection. Still another community is now beginning to flourish in El Paraíso, Chalatenango. In that district the Bethlehemite Sisters are preparing studies to give a little life to the area's social and industrial activities, which are now rather dead. Since, as we'll stress later, the church has a social dynamism, she is also interested in this kind of development.

In speaking of the life of our church, let us also make some reference, dear sisters and brothers, to religious life, and let us appreciate it. The Spanish Carmelite Missionary Sisters are working in the Polyclinic and also do pastoral ministry in Plan del Pino and La Laguna of Chalatenango. This year they're celebrating twenty-five years of ministry in El Salvador, and we'll celebrate the anniversary in Plan del Pino with a confirmation of young people who are preparing themselves with much enthusiasm.

The Jesuits are a highly visible part of our church; many of them are admired and loved; others are disparaged and slandered. They are now undertaking for us a marvelous work. This week, along with Father Sáenz, I had the opportunity to visit the construction site of a beautiful building that will be called Centro Loyola. It is a place where the charisms proper to the Jesuits, such as the Spiritual Exercises and reflection sessions, will be offered to help our people become more conscious of what true Christianity is all about. I invite anyone who wishes to see

this magnificent work that's now underway to pass by Lomas de Morazán¹, near the UCA². Within a short time, certainly by next year, we'll have a fine center of spirituality and reflection open to all sectors of our people.

In the life of the diocese, sisters and brothers, Catholic schools are also important instruments of pastoral ministry, and this week they saw much activity. We regret and express our solidarity with the suffering of the board members of the Federation of Catholic Education Centers who were hurt in a car accident in the diocese of Santa Ana, where they were working on a problem of their organization. They're on the mend now, thank God, and their suffering has been for a good cause.

The Colegio Santa Cecilia in Santa Tecla has offered a wonderful spectacle these days in their fourth annual celebration of youth week. For four years now they have been bringing young people together to give them the message of the Gospel. On Monday I had the good fortune of being with the youngsters. More than a thousand young men and women filled the theater to kickoff the week.

The Instituto Ricaldone, also of the Salesians, celebrated the 163rd anniversary of the birth of Don Bosco with a wonderful Mass in the church of María Auxiliadora. Don Bosco was born and baptized on the same day, August 16, 1815. We tried to convey the message of Don Bosco to the young people there, as we'll also try to do tomorrow in the Colegio Don Bosco, where they're celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the establishment of the first Salesian schools in the country. The Salesians also have the Colegio San José in Santa Ana.

We were greatly consoled to receive a visit from students from the Colegio de la Divina Providencia, who presented us with a booklet that summed up their thoughts from a week of reflection on marriage preparation. It's interesting that these young people in high school are coming to the realization that marriage is not some crazy adventure. They don't want to prostitute a great gift like sexuality and marriage. Instead, with the help of some recordings that are available through the Radio Service of Latin America, SERPAL, they have been reflecting on this fascinating theme with the help of concrete cases.

We are also delighted in a very special way with the life of our seminary. As church documents affirm, the seminary is like the pupil of the eye of the diocese, the place that shapes the hopes of our people as they move forward with the guidance of priests (ACS 51). As was announced in the meeting of the clergy, we will be intensifying vocational promotion in all the parishes. We call upon everyone—parents, Christian families, priests—to search among our young people and try to discover where God has placed that precious gift of vocation. Where it is found, analyze it and submit it to the formation process which is the seminary. One of these young seminarians is now nearing the summit. I felt great consolation when Rafael Urrutia, who's now finishing four years of theology in the seminary of Guatemala, asked me to ordain him to the priesthood on November 4. From this moment, sisters and brothers, let us rejoice in this and pray for him because here in the cathedral on Saturday the fourth of November at eleven o'clock in the morning we will have the honor of laying our hands on a young man who, like the young men in the seminary, is willing to bear witness in the midst of such difficult times that Christ is alive and can count on young hearts that desire to follow him—even

¹ The site is actually Lomas de Cuscatlán.

² The Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas of the Jesuits.

heroically. In this regard—and this concerns mostly you who are lay people—the Serra Club, a lay organization, will hold its convention from the fifteenth to the seventeenth of September; at the convention they will provide information about the different seminaries. This is a lay organization that collaborates in promoting vocational work and above all gives moral support and encouragement to young people.

There is still more news, such as the news I joyfully received from San Miguel: Radio YSAX can now be heard there in San Miguel! It could always be heard before, but only with difficulty. I hope that you're listening to us now with greater clarity and that your beloved city is receiving these humble words from one who loves it dearly.

Many are asking about the pastoral letter³ I announced on August sixth. I'm very happy to see the interest it has aroused, but I'm sad to have to tell you: please wait a bit. Within a few days it will be in circulation, with God's help—by next Sunday, God willing.

Besides this encouraging news about the church, there have also been some false interpretations, such as the item hidden away in *El Diario de Hoy*—if someone hadn't told me about it, I wouldn't have noticed it. The article distorts the homily in which I thanked the legislative power for decreeing three days of national mourning for the death of the pope; the quotes in the article contain words that are not mine, for example: «The good relations that exist between the Catholic Church and the state belie the notion that the clergy have been slandered». You are witnesses that I never said that. I maintain the position that I am not in confrontation with anyone. I am simply trying to serve the people. Consequently, those who are in conflict with the people will also be in conflict with me, for my love is the people. The light of faith makes it clear that the mandate God has given me is to lead this people along the paths of the Gospel. You can see who is with me and who is not with me just by looking at the people and the people's relationships.

Be very careful, sisters and brothers, regarding this bit of church news I share with you: I know that people are going about collecting signatures. They want to send a petition to the pope—not Paul VI but the new pope—and to the meeting of bishops in Puebla, asking for the condemnation of Marxism. That's quite all right, but there already exists a condemnation of Marxism—that's nothing new. Pius XII published a document in that regard; if you're not familiar with it, go search it out.⁴ What concerns me more is that this petition is also asking for my removal. I have no problem with being removed, and I have no desire for power in the diocese. I consider what I'm doing as simply a service, and as long as the Lord keeps me here by the will of the pontiff, I will keep my conscience faithful to the light of the Gospel, which is what I try to preach, nothing more and nothing less.

Now we get into the substance of the matter. I want you to understand what my job is and how I'm fulfilling it. I study the word of God that will be read each Sunday. I look around me and behold my people. I shed light on what I see with this word, and finally I draw out a synthesis that I can communicate to the people so that they themselves will be light for the world and be guided by sound criteria and not by earthly idolatries. Naturally, the idols of earth and those who worship them are disturbed by these words, and they have great interest in doing away with them, silencing them, killing them. Let come to pass whatever God wills, but

³ *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978).

⁴ *Decree on Communism*, published by the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office after being approved by Pius XII on 1 July 1949.

his word is not chained, as Saint Paul says (2 Tim 2:9). There will always be prophets, priests, or lay people who understand what God's word demands and what God wants for our people.

The church has a missionary dynamism

If you've paid attention to today's word, you'll discover—even without my commenting on it—that there exist three dynamisms: Christ himself guarantees that this kingdom of God has a missionary dynamism, a spiritual dynamism, and a social dynamism.

When I speak, first of all, of a missionary dynamism, I behold Christ in today's gospel and see how generous he is. He travels to the limits of Palestine in order to see from there the borders of the Gentile world. And a Gentile woman, a Canaanite, comes to him seeking the power of God that Christ bears. The dialogue of the saving Christ with this representative of the Gentile world seems harsh, but it really is not if we understand what those times and those people were like. «It's not good to throw the children's food to the dogs», says Jesus (Matt 15:26). Notice the contrast that existed in the Jewish mentality. The Jews were the children, and the other peoples—the Gentiles, among whom we'd be included—were the dogs. Yet the humility of that Canaanite woman wins over the heart of the Redeemer. «Yes, Lord...», she says (Matt 15:27). They say that this is a very typical expression for Middle Easterners, who are very quick to take a thought and give it a humorous turn or make a marvelous riposte. The Canaanite woman shows Christ her lightness of spirit, and Christ reveals that he lives in an incarnate world, making his own the ways of the people and the times. The Canaanite woman says to him, «Yes, Lord, but even the little dogs eat the scraps that fall from the tables of their masters». And Jesus: «Woman, great is your faith!» (Matt 15:28).

But even before Christ looked out the window onto the Gentile world, the first reading tells us, God refused to impose territorial limits. The text speaks about foreigners about whom God says, «I will bring them to my holy mountain, for my house is a house of prayer, and all the nations shall call it such» (Isa 56:7). This is God's plan; it is not to save only the people of Israel. The strategy of God is to bring forth light from this people, a divinized people illumined by the light of God, and to let it shine for all the peoples of earth. The intention of God is the salvation of all. The Council has a specific document that explains beautifully this missionary dynamism of the church; it states that the pilgrim church is called missionary because it is the fruit of God the Father who sends us forth (AG 5). That's what mission means; it comes from the Latin verb *mittere*, to send. «Just as my Father sends me and makes me a missionary, so I send you and make you my missionaries» (John 20:21). The Council says that the Father sent his Son as his missionary; after the Son accomplished this work in his person and returned, the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit as a missionary to give life to the church. As a result, this church, as the fruit of this mission of the Father and the Son, is herself truly missionary; she has a universal dynamism (AG 4).

The first part of God's strategy is expressed by Christ when he says, «I have been sent to the lost sheep of Israel» (Matt 15:24). He could not leave the confines of Palestine, and he didn't leave them, but he did tell his disciples «You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth» (Acts 1:8). When he rises full of power and majesty, he sends his church into the world, saying, «All power in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go into the whole world, and make all the peoples disciples of Christianity. Baptize all persons in my faith» (Matt 28:18-19). The missionary dynamism has been unleashed with the coming of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

But the second reading tells us that God gave preference to his own people. I invite you, dear sisters and brothers, to reflect on this text in your homes and notice the strategy that Saint Paul describes. He does this in what we might call a dialectical but effective way. He says that God gave preference to his own people, but they proved unworthy of that gift of God. Only a remnant, a small group, remained faithful. The rest rejected Christ. Twenty centuries have passed, and the Jews have not accepted Christ. This caused Saint Paul great grief. Recall Saint Paul's words last Sunday: «I would gladly be accursed if only my sisters and brothers would accept this salvation» (Rom 9:3). Because they did not accept Christ's salvation, the apostles shook the dirt from their sandals and went forth to the Gentile nations (Mark 6:11). Christ left Palestine only that time he met the Canaanite woman; he did not travel through Gentile territory because, in accord with promises made in former times, he felt he was sent only to fulfill the promises regarding Israel, the people who were themselves supposed to be missionaries. But when they proved unworthy, the apostles went elsewhere to preach. In his letter Saint Paul says, «I am a Jew. I am of the tribe of Benjamin, but the Lord has chosen me to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Since I still love my people Israel, I preach salvation to the Gentiles in the hope of provoking jealousy in my compatriots» (Rom 11:1,13-14).

This is the strategy of the Gospel: it is first for the Jews, but they don't accept it. Then it goes to the Gentiles, and as they begin to accept it, the Jews become jealous. They see how the Gentiles are benefiting from the grace that God was offering them, and so they begin to be converted. Saint Paul's argument is this: if the obstinacy of the Jews and their rejection of Christ have brought salvation to the Gentiles, then the torrent of life that flows forth when the Jews are converted and filled with God will be tremendous! That's why many people in our day have come to believe that the end of the world will occur when the Jews are converted, but that's not what the Bible says. What the Bible says is that when the Jews are converted, there will be fullness of life in the Jewish people which will also become fullness of faith and life in the Gentile nations (Rom 11:25-26).

In this way, then, Saint Paul shows us the universal nature of salvation by positing a dialectical antagonism between the Jewish people and the Gentiles. That's why his letter ends today with a phrase that seems very mysterious to us: «God delivered all to disobedience so that he might have mercy on all» (Rom 11:32). Salvation supposes sin. The Jews have sinned by rejecting Christ, and the Gentiles have sinned by not accepting the true God when the Jews proclaimed him to them. But now that the Gentiles accept him, Paul says, God has mercy on them and forgives their former disobedience and lack of faith. And when the Jewish people out of envy or emulation turn away from their sinful disobedience, then they too will return and be saved.

What a wonderful lesson this is, sisters and brothers, for all of us «caught up in disobedience». The people who point out the sins of others without seeing their own sinfulness are not worthy of God's salvation. Whenever the church's sins are thrown in the face of the pope and the bishops, people are forgetting this great strategy of God. God is making use of the sin and disobedience of a church composed of wretched human elements to save us by his mercy. The only thing that is important here is God's mercy, and that is received through faith.

The church has a spiritual dynamism

This then is the second idea of today's readings: the spiritual dynamism of the church. I want you to keep this very much in mind, sisters and brothers, because many people, as you'll read in our pastoral letter, are trying to influence the church in order to direct her dynamism toward temporal kinds of redemption. The church does not reject these temporal forms of redemption. I state in my pastoral letter that the church generously supports all just objectives and the right of people to organize. No one can deprive people of the right to free association as long as the association pursues just causes.

We are not defending associations of criminals, wherever they may be found. There is no right to associate together for the purpose of kidnapping or robbing or killing. But uniting in order to survive, to eat, to defend your rights—everyone has a right to do that. Organization is a right when the objectives are just, and the church will always support that right to organize and the just objectives of the organizations. But don't ask the church to exercise her dynamism exclusively for that.

I base my reflections in this homily on the words of the Second Vatican Council, which are also words based on the Bible: «Christ, to be sure, gave his church no proper mission in the political, economic, or social order. The purpose which he set before her is a religious one». Take note of that! «But out of this religious mission itself comes a function, a light, and an energy which can serve to structure and consolidate the human community according to the divine law. As a matter of fact, when circumstances of time and place produce the need, the church can and indeed should initiate activities on behalf of all people, especially those designed for the needy, such as the works of mercy and similar undertakings» (GS 42).

Here the Council presents the two dynamisms I want to explain now. The first is the spiritual dynamism. The specific mission of the church is religious since she helps people relate to God and unites them with God. Today's readings contain several points in this regard.

For example, the first reading tells us, «My house is a house of prayer, and all the nations shall call it such» (Isa 56:7). I have always reminded you, sisters and brothers, that our power is in prayer. If Christians don't pray, they can't rely on this spiritual dynamism. We saw that the Canaanite woman uttered a prayer and that God through Christ was moved to help her because of the prayer.

Second, the second reading and the gospel both praise faith. «Great is your faith!», Christ says to the woman (Matt 15:28), and Saint Paul in the second reading says, «Those who have been obedient will find mercy» (Rom 11:30). Faith is a type of obedience or acceptance of God. Without faith it's impossible to belong to this kingdom of God. The spiritual dynamism of the church derives from faith. I'm saddened when some Catholic says, «I no longer have faith». But I feel immense joy when I hear words that are spoken often these days: «I have recovered my faith in the church». Let us recover our faith. It's what gives us strength to support one another mutually.

Besides faith and prayer we need humility! It's a virtue unknown in the world, but the Canaanite woman knows what it is. Instead of resenting the harsh words of Christ who calls her a «little dog», she responds to him with a smile, «Even the little dogs eat what falls from the table of their masters» (Matt 15:27). Christ might have added, «How great is your humility!» Humility is truth, and pride, which is its opposite, is the worst of human foolishness; it means

believing in yourself and even thinking that you're divine and irreplaceable. We should all be humble in the sense of truthful, recognizing our limitations and our smallness.

A spiritual sense is what we experience now as we hear the Lord say, «I will bring them to my holy mountain, and everyone will call my house a house of prayer. There I will receive sacrifices and holocausts» (Isa 56:7). Understand the liturgical sense of these words. To come to Mass is to serve. That's what liturgy means: service. We can also call our Mass a service in the sense that we come like servants to bring bread and wine as symbols of our efforts and our labor so that God can take them and make them his Body and his Blood and feed the world. When we come to Mass, we all collaborate, even the poor person who comes to tell God, «Lord, I have no work. I spent the whole week looking for work, and I can bring you nothing but my anxieties. I don't have a job». That also is service. That also is offering; it is holocaust; it is sacrifice. Or it may be the mother who comes to tell God about her child's sickness, or the mother of the person they have disappeared. Or it may be someone who has been tortured and comes to offer his torment to the Lord: «Today I suffered imprisonment. I bring you my battered back». Or it may be someone suffering the moral pain of calumny, such as the woman who wrote me from a village of Chalatenango; she was the victim of a vicious tongue. If she is listening to me now, let me tell her, «Your moral situation should not afflict you if your conscience is clear». How beautiful is the holocaust of the Mass when we can say to the Lord, «Lord, you know I am innocent, and even though the whole world singles me out, I offer you this holocaust». This is the service of the priestly people. This is the mission of the church, and it's what I'm doing now: making people aware of the spiritual meaning of their lives and the divine value of their human actions. Do not lose sight of this, dear sisters and brothers. This is what the church has to offer to organizations, to politics, to industry, to business, to journalists, to the market ladies. To everyone the church offers this service of promoting spiritual dynamism. Who is unable to offer God sincere effort in their spiritual life?

I find still another spiritual element in the readings: conversion. The whole second reading is a poem about the need for conversion on the part of both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 11:32). Both have been caught up in disobedience: «We have sinned!» And neither of them, neither Jews nor Gentiles, can boast; they can only hope that the mercy of God will pardon our universal disobedience. «Be converted!» When we point out from here the sins of people, the sins of the government, the sins of capital, the sins of criminals, the sins also of our church, the sins of Catholic schools, the sins of the bishops themselves among whom is counted this servant of yours, the sins of our priests, the sins of married couples—who has no sin? There are sins of youth, sins of adulthood, even sins of childhood. Kids hardly reach the age of reason before they're disobeying! «God delivered us all to disobedience so that he might redeem us with his mercy» (Rom 11:32). What we have done in pointing out human sin, I repeat, is to call people to conversion. For that Christ came, and for that he has sent forth his church. The kingdom of God possesses this great spiritual dynamism called conversion.

Think about it, sisters and brothers: just when the world faces great social and political demands, just when we need changes that are bold and profound, who will make them happen? Medellín states clearly that change will come only from «new men and women», persons renewed by conversion (M 1,3). The world will not be renewed by those who are stuck in decrepit systems or by those who want to preserve an intolerable situation by sin and crime and repression. That's not the way the world is renewed. What is needed is for politicians and non-politicians, for people of power and ordinary people, for all of us to try to renew ourselves by interior conversion.

This week let us try to use the light of this word to discover where the evil is in our republic, and we will find it first in our own conscience. We have all sinned. We're told what those indigenous tribes do when someone has been killed: each person has to pass by the corpse and stretch his hand over it saying, «I am innocent»; in that way the person truly guilty is discovered. But I think now what we all have to do is pass before the bloodied body of our country and repeat the words the poet uttered before the crucified Christ: «Tremble, human beings, for we have all laid hands on him».

This, then, is a spiritual movement of conversion, from the highest to the lowest. Just as an electric current floods an installation with energy and also runs through our veins, through our soul, through our heart, so the meaning of God's word today is the conversion that makes us new men and new women. As Paul VI of happy memory said, what use is a change of structures if the people who manage the structures and live in them are not renewed themselves (EN 36)? The only change will be a change of sins; the system will change, but the sin will remain. That's why before any renewal of structure—or better, along with the renewal of structures—we need a renewal of hearts.

The church has a social dynamism

And so, sisters and brothers, I'm already speaking about my third thought, which is the social dynamism of the church. I'm not inventing this. In fact, I'm taking all these ideas from today's readings!

The prophet Isaiah says that God will also call foreigners, but with one condition: «Promote justice! Do what is right! For my salvation is ready at hand, and my victory is about to be revealed» (Isa 56:1). What a beautiful promise! Let us hear these words as a hope for El Salvador! God must triumph! The devil will never triumph by promoting sin. It will be God who triumphs by promoting renewal.

And the renewal is here now in these few words: «Promote justice! Do what is right!» (Isa 56:1). You can see that this isn't merely some fancy of the church; the church hasn't set aside her mission in order to become involved in politics. The Council has already told us that the church's mission is not political. Nevertheless, the church's religious mission is based on her relationship with God, and from that she derives the strength and dynamism to become a force for political renewal, social renewal, and moral renewal without neglecting her religious role. (GS 42).

I am quite conscious, sisters and brothers—and those who have followed me closely will agree with me in this—that I have never used this *cathedra* to do politics. Rather, I have done religion. I have communicated the religious message of the church and have derived from it, as the Council says, the dynamic forces that build up a society according to the heart of God.

That's why, when I'm asked to dialogue with the government, I say, «But that's too little. I'm not the one who should be dialoguing. It should be the forces of the country; it should be the political parties; it should be the groups that have social awareness». The government must open up democratic channels so that there's dialogue with all the forces that can make a contribution to the country. This is what it means to promote justice and do what is right (Isa

56:1). This is what the church tells them; this is what Isaiah tells us; this is what the Gospel says.

But promoting justice and doing what is right is not going to happen just because the bishop dialogues with the president. It will happen when the government of El Salvador, which must be a «moral force» and not a despotic force—so says the Council (GS 74)—respects the dignity and freedom of all the citizens and dialogues with all the organizations that are concerned about making El Salvador a better place. They are the technical experts. I'm not an expert either in sociology or politics or organization. I'm simply a humble pastor who is saying to those who are technical experts: come together, and put all your knowledge at the service of this people. Don't close yourselves off, but make a contribution. That's when justice will be promoted and right will be done.

Events of the week

What I'm going to say now, sisters and brothers, is not politics. Our office has put together a very detailed study of those who have disappeared⁵. Ninety-nine cases have been carefully analyzed. The records include the names, the ages, where they were captured, what legal procedures were followed, and how many times the mothers have gone looking for their loved ones. Since I am a witness to the truth of these ninety-nine cases, I have a perfect right to ask: where are they? In the name of this suffering people, I have the right to say: bring them before the tribunals if they're alive. And if, tragically, the security agents have killed them, then let responsibility be determined, and let those responsible be sanctioned, whoever they are. Those who have killed should be punished. I believe that this demand is just.

Another study we've done is an analysis of the Law of Defense and Guarantee of Public Order. It points out clearly the law's false presuppositions. The social-political context of El Salvador does not merit the passing of such a repressive law. The study shows it to be unconstitutional. When the dispositions of the Law of Public Order are compared with the dictates of human rights and the constitution, there is a clear series of violations. The study documents recent, concrete cases in which the application of this law caused true havoc, especially among our poor folk. One poor fellow said something to me that I'll never forget, and neither will you: «This law, *Monseñor*, is like a snake: it bites only those of us who are walking barefoot». In this study we also gather together the statements of those who repudiate the law. These voices of the people must be heard! Invite them to dialogue! That's why I say that an authentically political channel must be opened up so that, when a demand for a repeal of this law reaches the Assembly, that group can be called on, especially if it includes well-known people, lawyers, people who understand. Why are they responded to with silence? Why is no attention paid to them? In this report we also include a list of those imprisoned for breaking this law. Some are recent cases, such as that of Adrián Serrano Peraza, captured in Portillo del Norte; or that of Antonio de Jesús Hernández, a social worker who worked in the Christian Social Secretariat of the Diocese of Santiago de María; or that of José Neftalí Gutiérrez; or that of Salvador Alejandro Beltrán Peña, whose mother, Vicenta de Jesús Beltrán, has reliable knowledge that her son is being held at the National Police precinct and has a fractured collarbone, even though the police deny it. Many petitions of habeas corpus get nowhere. What right do they have to deny a lawyer access to investigate the family's petition?

⁵ Bulletin No. 5 of the Social Communications Secretariat of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, August 1978. The names of the ninety-nine disappeared persons can also be found in the «Solidarity» section of *Orientación* (10 September 1978).

We know also from trustworthy sources that the ANDES is seeking the freedom of Pedro Bran and Salvador Sánchez Cerón⁶, claiming that the reasons given for the raid are not valid. The alleged delinquent whom the police were pursuing and whom they used as an excuse for entering the offices of ANDES stated before the judge in the Hospital Rosales that he had been shot in the Plaza Zurita.

The news item about the teacher Pedro Arévalo is also distorted. It says that he is a teacher in the Externado and that a committee of students from the school is trying to obtain his release (since the Jesuits are unable to do so) and have associated with our Legal Aid Office to that end. All that is false. The teacher Arévalo used to work in the Externado, but he has not taught there for a year now. There is no committee of students, and the Legal Aid Office is closely related to the church; it's a legal aid service that the Colegio Externado has been offering to needy people for the past three years. It wasn't invented just today. For three years now we have been trying to be faithful to this ideal of providing help in legal matters to the poorest people of the country, no matter where they come from. I can bear witness to the self-sacrifice and generosity with which the Legal Aid Office has provided many services to our poorer classes. As pastor of the archdiocese, I have taken full responsibility in giving moral backing to this legal aid work. It is not something unique to El Salvador. Similar organizations already exist in Chile, in Uruguay, and wherever accused persons need defense, especially those who are poor. That is also the reason why the news that connected Legal Aid with AGEUS is false. AGEUS has nothing to do with the church's legal aid. As you can see, the news gets twisted about, and it's necessary to exercise criteria when reading the newspaper.

In light of this message about social dynamism and concern for the life of the world, we cannot help but deplore this morning, sisters and brothers, the kidnapping of Kjell Bjork⁷, the general manager of Ericsson, just as we also deplore the mystery surrounding the disappearance of Armando Monedero. The same can be said of the case of Mr. Matsumoto; the manifest nonsense regarding this last case has dangerous implications. I hope it doesn't serve as a pretext for assaulting other persons. I want to express here my admiration for Mrs. Matsumoto's serenity of spirit, and I ask her pardon for including her among the widows. She told me, «I am not a widow. I consider my husband to be alive as long as I have no reliable news as to his whereabouts»⁸. I congratulated her and told her, «I only wish that our people had such integrity so as not to believe in rumors and even to be convinced that they've been told the truth».

At the same time we rejoice, sisters and brothers, for there is good news also. Negotiations have begun for a collective contract in the glove factory, Eagle International. And I was especially happy yesterday at this news from the Legal Aid Office: a lease contract was signed for fifty *campesino* families at a hacienda in Suchitoto. Some fine comments were made in this regard: «It is important to highlight this event to show that *campesinos* respond well when they are offered genuine opportunities that truly benefit them. The root of the problem is the lack of communication with these huge sectors of dispossessed people . . . », and the statement goes on.

⁶ The second surname of Salvador Sánchez is actually Cerén.

⁷ Kjell Bjork, a Swede, was kidnapped on 14 August 1978. See *El Mundo* (15 August 1978).

⁸ The *Diario de Hoy*, in its edition of 15 August 1978, published a news item under the heading: «Matsumoto is thought to be Buried in El Cocal».

Accordingly, sisters and brothers, we plead for just causes and will continue to do so on behalf of anyone who defends such causes, rich or poor. And now, dear sisters and brothers, with this dynamism that the church injects into the missionary, spiritual, and social spheres, let us go forth from our cathedral strengthened with the Body of the Lord and with our liturgy. May our celebration lead us to the conviction that Christian spirituality doesn't mean raising ourselves up to be close to God while we forget about the earth. Rather, it means the dynamic balance of wanting all people to be saved; it has a missionary dynamism. It means being closely united to God's transcendence through prayer, humility, faith, and the Christian virtues, but it is from these that we derive the courage and integrity we need to stand up also for the rights of people who need defenders and who can hope to find them only in people who believe in God and in the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the last minute I've been informed that the young man Porfirio Cristales was captured by three municipal police officers as he was getting off the Route 36 bus in Mejicanos. We hope that this is not still another case of unjust assault. We certainly feel that justice should be done. If a person is captured as a criminal, for doing wrong, and that is proved in the courts, then let punishment be meted out. But we are not in agreement with individuals who on their own initiative make themselves judges and punishers when they are neither.

May our Lord, then, enlighten all of us this morning so that we truly live this beautiful message of conversion and seek in God our reason to live and to hope.