

THREE CONDITIONS TO ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Twenty-eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time
October 14, 1979

Wisdom 7:7-11
Hebrews 4:12-13
Mark 10:17-30

My dear sisters and brothers

The second reading that we have just listened to describes the true attitude of Christians who come to Mass on Sunday. It is a letter written to Christians who had converted from Judaism but who, during a time of persecution, experienced a longing for their former Jewish religion and were in danger of apostasy and renouncing their faith. This letter is addressed to these people and chapters three and four also present us with a beautiful reflection at this time in the life of the people of El Salvador.

The author of this letter returns to the origins of the Hebrew people, to the time when Moses led the people out of Egypt. They had to walk through the desert for forty years before entering the Promised Land. Later, the Exodus event of the Old Testament encouraged the Israelites in their hope at the time when they were deported to another desert, the desert of Babylon. The prophets remind the people of the wonderful deeds of God who brought them out of Egypt. Therefore, they should trust that a new Exodus will occur and that they will be delivered from Babylon and return to the Holy Land. Saint Paul uses these two comparisons in chapter three and four but he does not refer to the Jewish people but rather to those Jewish men and women who converted to Christianity --- people like ourselves. He tells them: *all of this, the liberation from Egypt, the journey through the desert, and entering the Lord's rest, is nothing more than a prefigurement* (1). The Promised Land was called *entering the Lord's rest*. This is a figure of the liberation of the Christian people who struggle to obtain freedom from sin. The long journey through the desert represents our life with its temptations against fidelity and against trust in the power of God. Remember when the people were by the rock in the desert and were thirsty and threatened Moses because he had led them out of Egypt. This was a difficult time in their journey and for this reason the place was called *Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the Lord* (2). Nevertheless, God once again performed a marvelous deed and made water spring from the rock and the people were able to continue their journey.

Our rest is not in the Promised Land, but rather our rest is in heaven, in the sanctuary where the new Moses, Jesus, has entered with his redemption, thus opening the doors to all those who want to be saved. Like the pilgrims in the desert, not everyone entered the land of rest because sin brought a sentence of death upon many of the Israelites who left Egypt. They did not experience the joy of achieving the goal of their journey. Those who had faith and who were born in the desert during the forty year journey and those who identified themselves with people who trusted and hoped in the promises of the Lord, these people entered the rest of God.

The letter to the Hebrews reminds us of a psalm that commemorates this event and states: *Oh, that today you would hear his voice, "harden not your hearts"* (3). It is here that the passage that we have read is inserted. We have heard the words: *The word of God is living and effective,*

sharper than any two edged sword, penetrating even between soul and spirit, joints and marrow and able to discern reflections and thoughts of the heart. No creature is concealed from him but everything is naked and exposed for the eyes of him to whom we must render an account (4). With this motivation Saint Paul wants to encourage Christians not to become discouraged in their faith because the Word of God, which nourishes Sunday after Sunday and which they reflect upon with their family and in their community --- this Word of Sacred Scripture nourishes, judges and, like a sword, penetrates the heart, penetrates *even between soul and spirit*. This phrase has been discussed by Biblical commentators and it appears to many that the human person is not only body and soul but also that the soul, the spiritual dimension of the person, opens itself to receive a new spirit, the divine life of God. The Word of God penetrates the depths and fills the potential of the human person, a potential that God alone can fill. Thus the letter to the Hebrews, to the Christian community, is addressed not only to the Jews, but also to us, converts to the faith, and invites us to see our Sunday celebration of the Eucharist as a day of nourishment for our spiritual life.

This exhortation is highly topical. Sunday, the Lord's day, a day of rest, is a symbol that penetrates the labor of women and men and speaks to them about the great rest that they long for. Each Sunday when we come to Mass we affirm the fact that our journey through the desert has paused before the fountain of the Word that nourishes us. Let us be careful to nourish ourselves so that this week we might live with optimism and encouragement. Let no one remain wandering in the desert! Let no one forsake their trust in the Lord! Let us approach God who speaks to us in the dialogue of the divine Word during our liturgy of the Word, who speaks until the time that this living Word, which penetrates the depths of our intentions, judges us and gives us a place of eternal rest. Let us not be among those who are excluded from this rest. Let us not be among those who die in the desert and do not arrive at the Promised Land.

This is my great concern as pastor and you encourage me in this with your attention, your perseverance and with your own desire to be nourished with these divine words. Thus we have rendered homage to the second reading. Now with faith in the Word of God and attempting to be always faithful to the Word despite temptations and persecutions, despite the problems and difficulties of the world, we draw near today to reflect on a problem that is very present in our lives, a problem that is the focus of the gospel and the first reading.

The present problem, one that I believe is the cause of the crisis of our country, one that I have pointed out on so many occasions, is the problem of a hierarchy of values. There are people who give an absolute value to wealth, property, political power and the things of this world. At the same time, today, the readings teach us that the only absolute value is God and the following of Jesus. Therefore in my fourth Pastoral Letter I say that during this time of crisis in El Salvador, the Church makes a great contribution: she denounces the idolatries of our society and revitalizes that which many people adore as idols and absolutes.¹ Today the Word of God enters this arena and eliminates a great obstacle to the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

My beloved sisters and brothers, if here we preach in a way that is painful to those who make idols out of the things of this world, we do not do this in some evil way or in some form of demagoguery. Rather we do this because Jesus commands his preachers to proclaim the true Kingdom of God among people and to denounce every sin that is opposed to the Kingdom of God.* Today's Mass calls us to this and in today's readings we find the following theme for our reflection: *three conditions to enter the Kingdom of God*. I will develop the following points: First, fulfill the commandments; Second, a spirit of poverty and detachment; and Third, follow Jesus. Here I summarize the divine Word. Hopefully I, first of all, and you with me, will truly become converted to the Kingdom of God. Let us not become lost in the midst of so many trifling realities that can

make us lose perspective of the divine. Rather let us put in their proper place all those things that the world considers as absolutes, all those things that the world sees as having great value, all those realities that appear to be the summit of the hierarchy of their interest. Let us do this so that we do not erect idols but use these things as servants of humanity so that ultimately we can enter the Kingdom of God.

Fulfill the commandments

The gospel narration is most descriptive. Imagine a young man (Saint Mark does not refer to a young man but in the parallel passage in Saint Matthew's gospel (5) we find the person referred to as a *young man*) running and kneeling before Jesus and asking the most interesting question that a person could place before God: *Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?* (6). Jesus responds: *Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not defraud; honor you father and your mother".* What a beautiful catechetical lesson is given to the young man who is anxious to find the path of salvation! Hopefully all of us would come to our Sunday celebration with the same spirit: *Good teacher, what should we do to resolve the present crisis of our nation? Good teacher, you who calm the storms, why do you not bring calmness to us at this time of so much crime and violence in our country? What must we do to be happy in the midst of so much ugliness? What will give serenity to our conscience, our families, and our society?* We would also hear the same response of Jesus: *No one is good but God alone* (7). What a beautiful profession of goodness!

God is the source of goodness. If there is something good on earth, it is because it reflects God. If my mother was good, it is because God gave her this capacity for goodness. If my friend is good, if there are good people on earth (and in fact there are many good people on earth), it is because Jesus has oriented things in this way. All goodness is derived from the same unique source because only God is good par excellence; everything else is good because it participates in God's goodness. But people can decide to not participate in this goodness because no one has goodness as the essence of his/her being. Thus when people no longer participate in goodness, good is exchanged for evil. There is a saying: *corruptio optimi pessima*, that is, the corruption of the best is the worst. When people who have been good lose the essence of goodness, they become most cruel. It is said that in the beginning Nero was so good that he did not have the courage to kill an animal. Later on he did not tremble as he watched Christians burn as human torches. It is dangerous to lose goodness! When people forget that the goodness of their heart is derived from God, they begin to obscure their goodness. Do not forget, only God is good! If you want to be good then the first thing to do is believe in God. Believe in God not just in some theoretical way. God has created us and given us intelligence, life, family and a law --- keep the commandments. This is the path to eternal life: keep the commandments. Then Jesus begins to list the commandments.

This morning as we reflect on the path of goodness and the One who is good, it would be helpful to remember that in our fourth pastoral letter (I say *our* because this letter was written with the help that you gave me in your suggestions and responses to the questionnaire that was distributed) we came to the following conclusion: *Our moral decline is self-evident. On every side we find that what our Lord called the mystery of iniquity has taken over. It is the Church's pastoral duty not to cease in denouncing this reign of sin, and urgently to appeal to the personal responsibility of each of us, and to each social and family group, and especially to individuals or groups in authority who, directly or indirectly, benefit from this state of affairs. For it is these last who have in their hands the most effective means of remedying this situation.*² Then we mention the great defects of our society both on the level of public administration as well as on the personal and

private level. I believe that it is necessary to resolve this situation because we are all witnesses that each week we find events that are truly part of the kingdom of sin.

It is interesting to note that when sinners fight among themselves they bring out all the dirty laundry. Today a denunciation has been made against the new taxes imposed on the coffee and cotton growers and this is perhaps a surprise to many people.³ In January of 1977 the renovation of El Hotel Presidente began with an initial budget of twelve million colones. One month later the budget had to be increased to eighteen million colones. When it was inaugurated thirty million colones had been spent. Later, when an addition was made to this building, another nine million colones was spent. Thus we have a hotel that cost thirty-nine million colones. The private sector that has denounced this waste stated: *another hotel could have been renovated for thirteen million colones or twenty-six million colones less than was spent on El Hotel Presidente.* Does not this dance of millions of colones appear to you, my sisters and brothers, as an abuse of the poverty of our country?*

I am happy that at this time when we have said that everyone has to speak out and if they are unable to proclaim the Kingdom of God then they can at least denounce the offenses against the law of God. The Dental Society of El Salvador has published a statement concerning the national reality. Among other things their statement seems to be a commentary on the words: *keep the commandments.* They state: *The present state of affairs is characterized by the prevalence of that which is unjust over that which is just and by a long chain of governments that have become more and more unpopular. With few exceptions there seems to be a lack of social sensitivity because laws seem to be applied to some persons and not to others. At the same time one social class seems to have everything while other people seem to lack everything.*⁴ Later they state: *Reactionary capitalists ought to realize that they are not feudal lords. They have to be humane and treat their employees, no matter how humble, with the dignity and respect that they merit as human beings. We are not mistaken when we say that money and power influence this situation and that many people have erected these realities as gods and done so in such a way that they have become insensitive to the pain and needs of those persons who work for them.*⁵

Later I will refer to other statements that seem to me to be most valid and that enable us to say that Jesus is right: we must return to the commandments. We must return to a situation where there is no robbery or adultery, where people and things are not made gods, where all people recognize that only God is good and that only those who fulfill his laws become good. Those who torture and kill and betray the law of God are evil. If people want to save themselves and enter the Kingdom of God they have to repent and be converted, they have to obey the law of God. This is the first path: the commandments of the law of God!

How good it would be if instead of preaching, we would all reflect in silence on the following question: *in what ways have I offended God?* How many causes of evil would be removed from our society if all of us here would be converted from our disobedience of the law of God and if all of us would leave here and act with truth and justice and love? My sisters and brothers, this is indispensable and the law of God is not some form of supererogation. This pertains to the very essence of the human person to the extent that God is interested in the fact that we obey his law because when we disobey God's law, we destroy ourselves. A society where envy and selfishness and abuse prevail over the law of God and the Ten Commandments, such a society results in the situation that we are all living. Let there be no doubt that El Salvador has separated itself from God and only by listening to Jesus' response to the young man can we find the path of salvation: fulfill the law of the Lord.

The descriptive narrative of the gospel continues. The young man says to Jesus: *Teacher, all of these I have observed from my youth* (8). The narrative becomes even more descriptive when it is stated that Jesus, *looking at him, loved him* (9). A dialogue of goodness! Hopefully, if the Lord were to look upon me, he would love me and not look at me and reproach me as he did when he encountered the hypocrites, the Pharisees, adulterers and sinners. The glance of Jesus, severe when directed toward his enemies, must be harsh, like the lashes from a whip. On the other hand, Jesus' look of love toward the young man who had observed the law is a look of kindness. There is no love like that of the smiling face of Jesus, satisfied that one is doing what is supposed to be done.

Nevertheless Jesus speaks again: *You are lacking one thing* (10). Here Jesus challenged the natural goodness of men and women. It is not enough to be good and it is not enough to leave evil aside. Christianity is positive and not simply a negation of things. There are many people who say: *I do not kill or steal or do harm to anyone!* This is not enough; something else is needed. The goodness of the young man was not complete. Jesus tells him what he is lacking: *Go, sell what you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and then, come, follow me* (11). When the young man heard these words *his face fell and he went away sad because he had many possessions* (12).

Spirit of poverty and detachment

It is not that Christ has a grudge against the rich not that the Church or its preaching campaigns against them. In no way. We have just said that *He looked on him with love* (13), and because he loved him, he taught him the true way. And if the Church preaches in hard words, it is not through ill will but to indicate the path to happiness.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, (14) - and this is already a commentary on this sad story of a rich person frightened of detachment - *"how hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God"* (15). The gospel tells us that the disciples were surprised. This was natural because they were men who had been formed in the spirituality of the Old Testament that held that long life and happiness on earth and God's blessings were found in possessing many things. But Jesus comes and places things in their proper perspective. He affirms that wealth is good and that happiness can be found in this world but none of these should be erected as an idol. Thus Jesus immediately corrects the disciples who were amazed at his words: *Children, how difficult for those who place their trust in money to enter the Kingdom of God* (16). There is nothing wrong with having money but to place one's trust in money is to make money an idol when in fact we should place our trust only in the one true God. Money is lost and gives security to no one. Experience tells us that those who place their trust in the things of this earth are never happy.

How hard for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God (17). Then Jesus uses this tremendous comparison: *it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God.* Again the disciples were surprised and said: *Then who can be saved?.* Jesus continued to look at them and said: *For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.* Jesus is telling the disciples that one can have wealth, but this wealth must be used on behalf of love and justice, must be used to do good. This, however, is a miracle and only God is able to do this. So yes, if the rich place their trust in God rather than money, they should ask God to show them how to use this money and then they would be holy and would be happy on earth.*

There then follows a colorful dialogue with Peter who was not rich but a fisherman who experienced freedom because he had left everything. Thus it is not a question of having much or

little. People who have little can be so attached to their possessions that they do not have the freedom of poor people. So this poor man, Peter, who had left everything, says: *We have given up everything and followed you* (18). Jesus said: *Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age ... and later eternal life.* In other words the spirit of detachment is necessary in order to possess true freedom.

I call your attention to the first encyclical of Pope Paul VI which I reread yesterday. When he speaks about the renewal of the world he points out two urgent virtues: first, a spirit of poverty and second, charity and love. These are two great virtues that are lacking at the present time.

When he speaks about the spirit of poverty he says: *We presume to mention it explicitly in this encyclical letter because of our conviction of the prominence which this precept receives in Christ's holy Gospel. It is a fundamental element of that divine plan by which we are destined to win the kingdom of God, and yet it is greatly jeopardized by the modern trend to set so much store by wealth. The zeal for the spirit of poverty is vitally necessary if we are to realize the many failures and mistakes we have made in the past, and learn the principle on which we must now base our way of life and how best to proclaim the religion of Christ* (19). This detachment gives us true freedom.

In the same letter the Pope says that the spirit of poverty is the true liberation of the human person: *We consider that the inner freedom which results from zeal for evangelical poverty makes us in fact more sensitive to the human aspects of economic questions, and better fitted to understand them* (20). Those who are poor in spirit can see the relationship between the present situation in El Salvador and the avarice of those who are wealthy. Those who lack this spirit of poverty do not have eyes that enable them to see that detachment provides them with great freedom and a great sensitivity to the economic and social problems of El Salvador. *We can pass, where necessary, a calm and often severe judgment on wealth and on the luxuries of life* (21). Progress and wealth have to be judged with Christian criteria and should not be judged with absolute criteria as though everything were progress. Indeed, we see that often progress leaves many people in misery while only a few receive the benefits of said progress. *We can come promptly and generously to the aid of those in need, and do our utmost to ensure that wealth, far from being a source of conflict, selfishness and pride amongst men, shall be used justly and equitably for the good of all, and distributed with greater foresight* (22). If the origin of our crisis is social injustice, then only the spirit of poverty and detachment can restore us to true happiness. Thus today Jesus is insistent upon the spirit of detachment and poverty.

During the last great Church event in Latin America, the meeting in Puebla, the path on which our people can find happiness was pointed out when reference was made to the preferential option for the poor. This does not mean that we should despise the rich and only be concerned for those people who are poor. I have repeated the formula of Puebla because it appears to me as something marvelous: it is an invitation to all social classes, rich and poor, to take as their own the cause of the poor who are identified with Jesus:⁶ *whatever you do for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you do for me* (23). My sisters and brothers, when will we see the day when we are all converted? Jesus told the young man: *It is not enough that you observe the commandments; you must also clothe yourself in a spirit of poverty and detachment.* Today we are told that the Word of God is like a sword that penetrates the depths of every heart, therefore I invite you to analyze the degree to which you are attached to the things of this world: Greatly? Little? Not important? Attachment is a personal attitude that makes us unpleasing, and this can be stated even about those who are most poor and living in misery.

Following Jesus

Finally, the third condition. Jesus told the young man: *then come, follow me* (24). This is primary. When Jesus tells Peter: *one who has given up everything ... for my sake and for the sake of the gospel* (25), he is pointing out a positive dimension of liberation.

The liberation that Christianity preaches is a liberation from something that enslaves to something that ennobles us. Those who talk only about enslavement, about the negative aspect of liberation, do not have all the power that the Church can give one. It struggles, yes, against the earth's enslavements, against oppression, against misery, against hunger. All that is true --- but, for what? For something. Saint Paul uses a beautiful expression: *to be free for love* (26). To be free for something positive, that is what Jesus means when he says: *Follow me!* (27). This is the most positive element that we could possess.

True liberators understand that if they struggle against enslavement, they do so because they are moving toward something positive. The event that we have referred to is the departure of people from slavery in Egypt, but there is a positive element: the Promised Land, rest, restoration of dignity. If people focus on only detaching themselves from material possessions and do not do this with love, do not search for God and the gospel, then we have an action that is abnormal. Therefore we can say that those liberators and revolutionaries who focus their struggle on negative elements, on violence and hatred and vengeance and overcoming the enemy --- we can say that these people have mutilated liberation. It is sad that such generosity should be wasted in such a negative manner.

On a certain occasion a communist was converted to Christianity because someone gave him the gospel to read. After his conversion he expressed his feelings in a beautiful prayer: *Lord, I know that I have come to know you and so I ask of you two graces. First, that you would generously give my former comrades this knowledge of you and second, that you would give those are now my Christian comrades the generosity of my former comrades.** It is a shame that Christians who possess such positive values and who have clear statements concerning the different forms of slavery should become careless and not utilize the treasure contained in these positive values: the treasures of following Jesus. It is sad to have to say that atheists and revolutionaries who have forgotten God are more willing to sacrifice themselves for their cause than Christians who have the great positive cause of Jesus. I call all of you, if you are truly Christian and have come here to reaffirm your faith during our Sunday celebration --- I call you to be a penetrating sword. (28) Let us not allow ourselves to become complacent in soul or spirit or the most intimate dimensions of our being. Let us question ourselves. Let us not sleep peacefully until we do something for the Kingdom of Christ and his gospel.

The young man had reason to fear following Jesus. He thought that in avoiding evil he could fulfill the commandments in some half-hearted, careless manner and that this was enough. There are many Christians today who judge others because these Christians believe they are good because they do no evil. This is not what Jesus desires. Jesus died for something more positive. Saint Paul states: *one died for all and therefore all have died* (29).

There is an advantage to following Jesus that is pointed out to us in the first reading. The Book of Wisdom, even though it is part of the Old Testament, envisions Christian wisdom. The author of this book was clearly imbued with the Greek mentality of Alexandria and saw what I spoke about before: the discouragement of those who shared his Jewish beliefs and their enthusiasm for Greek philosophy. So the author of this book dedicated himself to select from the Scriptures all the

motives to encourage those who professed the same Jewish faith. Thus the Book of Wisdom was written.

He imagined Solomon praying to God and asking for wisdom: *I prayed and it was given to me ... I pleaded and the spirit of Wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepter and throne and deemed riches nothing in comparison to her* (30). Blessed are those who come to an understanding of the meaning of wisdom, riches, and the infinite beauty of God for they will not be captivated by the idols of this earth.

I did not liken any priceless gem to her because all gold in view of her is a little sand and silver is to be accounted mire (31). Ah! If only people would discover the vanity of gold and uselessness of silver and the fragility of the goods of this earth when these are not enlightened by the wisdom of God.

The wise person says: *Beyond health and comeliness I preferred her* (32). There are those who instead of bowing down before the idols of gold and power, worship beauty, pleasure, and the vanities of life. But for those who are wise these realities have no splendor. Beauty and health cannot be compared to wisdom that never fades. (33) The Bible says: *What is human beauty? It is like the grass that in the morning shines forth but in the evening fades away.* How many people are losing the treasures of heaven because they prefer this fodder?

The first reading concludes with the beautiful words: *Yet all good things come to me in her company and countless riches at her hands* (34). It is curious how this happens: avaricious people are unwilling to detach themselves from the material goods that appear to them to contain all the treasures of life. Yet there is no one more foolish than an avaricious person. Pope Paul VI said: *Avarice, in individuals and in nations, is the most obvious form of stultified moral development* (35). Those who have much money are underdeveloped. Avaricious persons are those who covet and desire only the material goods of the world. Avaricious people are myopic and do not realize that when they detach themselves from these things out of love for the Kingdom of God, they will see their hands filled with greater wealth. This new treasure will shine brighter and be seen as more beautiful because in the hierarchy of values God, our Lord, has been given first place, God, our Lord, has become the absolute.

My sisters and brothers, there are the three conditions to enter the Kingdom of God. Now I would like us to ask the question: how is our society at the present time? How is our Church community? Yes, we must even ask about our Church community because the Word of God questions the first beneficiaries: the Church. My dream as I preach the Word of God and my hope as I see the attention that you give me is the following: to create our Church! This is the primary thing that I desire. Among all of us, let us build the Church according to the heart of Jesus --- a Church in which every member, from the bishop to the youngest child who was baptized today incorporate themselves into the Kingdom of God. Let us empower ourselves so that we can establish the Kingdom of God through our word, our community life, and our example. Let us not forget that we are servants of the Kingdom of God. Jesus has told us how we can enter the Kingdom of God: living these three conditions --- observing the commandments, clothing ourselves with a spirit of poverty and detachment and, above all, following Jesus who is the eternal wisdom of God, who *became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (36).

The Second Vatican Council speaks beautifully about these realities of wisdom and the following of Jesus Christ: *The intellectual nature of the human person is perfected by wisdom and needs to be, for wisdom gently attracts the mind of man to a quest and a love for what is true and*

good ... Our era needs such wisdom more than bygone ages if the discoveries made by man are to be further humanized. For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser men are forthcoming. It should also be pointed out that many nations, poorer in economic goods, are quite rich in wisdom and can offer noteworthy advantages to others (37). This is our treasure! I say this with pride: our humble people, from the city and the rural areas, give us priceless contributions of wisdom. Speak with a *campesino*, with an elderly woman or a young man or woman who, like the young man in today's gospel, runs to encounter Jesus. There are very wealthy communities where one is able to reflect with the people and find the treasure of wisdom and detachment, where one is able to see people handing themselves over to our Lord, Jesus Christ. This is the true greatness and wealth of our people: economically poor, but rich in wisdom that can be shared with the world. Let us become Christians who are filled with divine wisdom, Christians filled with and willing to share a love for the truth and the goodness of God. Let us not be conformists but as Christians let us know how to struggle and not be content with the injustice in which we live. At the same time, let us give our suffering a meaning of liberation rather than one of avarice which is a sign of a weak spirit.

Life of the Church

In light of what we have said I want to call to your attention some of the events of the past week. Let us begin by looking at our Church. I want to remind you of the commentary that the Pope made concerning his trip to the United States and tell you that his words coincide with our reflection and with the things that we practice here in the Diocese. The Pope said: *Our journey was a pilgrimage of faith and our only desire was to proclaim the gospel and to comfort those who are afflicted. Our journey was also one of peace and love and fraternity and this led me to the United Nations. In all the encounters with the multitudes I was an interpreter of the people's desire for justice and peace and so I spoke in the name of the poor and those who suffer, the oppressed, the humble and children.*⁷

This past week a beloved priest in our Archdiocese died, Father Vicente García Artola. He had two brothers who were priests and both of them, Father Salvador and Father Juanito, are also deceased. Let us extend our condolences to his family and to the Congregation of the Mission.

The priests from the Vicariate of Cuscatlán were on retreat during this past week and it was a very fruitful time for them. The pastoral ministers from the Vicariate of Mejicanos met and they are organizing themselves very well in this area of the capital.

In the parish of Nejapa in the Vicariate of Quezaltepeque we celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for some young people who were well prepared for this sacrament. I congratulate all of them. This afternoon at 6:00pm we will celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation for some young people from the area of La Rábida, San Francisco, Miramonte, Concepción and María Auxiliadora. This celebration will take place in the parish of María Auxiliadora.

In Plan del Pino the Carmelite Missionary Sisters have celebrated the month of October in honor of their patroness, the Virgin Mary. Today their prayers are being offered for my intentions. I profoundly thank them but because of other commitments I am unable to be with them today.

I congratulate the parish of La Palma for the way in which they organized a wonderful program of community prayer. At every hour of the day and night lay people are at prayer. This is a beautiful example and we should do whatever is necessary so that our whole diocese becomes a community of prayer.

In a beautiful ceremony thirty Sisters graduated from El Colegio del Espíritu Santo. There were Franciscans, Passionists, Carmelites of Saint Joseph, Carmelites of Saint Theresa, Sisters of the Good Shepherd, Josephites, and Sister Servants of Jesus in the Eucharist. I told them that they are an image of the Church ministering on behalf of the people's culture and therefore they should continue to make the connection between faith-culture and faith-life which is so necessary for our people.

We greet the Superior General of the Guadalupeana Sisters who is visiting El Salvador.

I am extremely grateful to all of you who have made contributions in support of Radio YSAX. As of October 12th we have received 2,100.00 colones. We are doing a study to put into practice what we spoke to you about previously, namely, to see if without having recourse to the business sector, Catholics would sustain a radio station that was wholly dedicated to Christian culture. The response has been very positive so far.*

Events of the week

From the perspective of the Church community, I invite everyone to grow in the three conditions that are needed to enter the Kingdom of God because in this way we are also better able to enlighten the reality that surrounds us. Therefore, let us look at this reality. With sadness we must affirm the fact that the mystery of iniquity reigns in our midst. But Christians, through their example, can transform the kingdom of sin into the Kingdom of God. Hopefully, this will occur very soon.

In light of today's readings, what does the impasse of the coffee growers and cotton growers, who reject the new taxes upon them by the government, say to us?⁸ The interests that ought to prevail are those that would benefit the majority of people. The common good should prevail over any individual good. While it is certain that the authorities have misused tax money and spent millions of colones on useless projects, it is also certain that the large producers of coffee and cotton enjoy many benefits that God has destined for all people and so they should be generous. We must change our sinful ways and break the impasse that is causing hardship to so many people. Again the benefits that the coffee and cotton growers enjoy are meant to be enjoyed by all people.

In the name of human rights and God's justice we are not in full accord with the statements that were made in the name of the country at the United Nations⁹ and the Organization of American States. An attempt was made to justify the repression in El Salvador by referring to the existence of subversive movements. It must be remembered that when the Commission on Human Rights¹⁰ (a commission of the Organization of American States) visited our country they affirmed the fact that there exists a true violation of the rights of people. It is necessary to admit that this sin is a reality and then we must seek ways to change this situation.

During 1978 there were 1,073 arrests. From January to August of this year there have been 444 arrests. Last year 80 political prisoners were detained; now there are 15. The government has emptied the jails of political prisoners but unfortunately the cemeteries have been filled with dead bodies.* In 1978, 147 people were assassinated for political motives. From January to September of this year there have been 580 assassinations --- four times as many as last year. The number of people who have disappeared has also increased in an alarming way. In 1977, 39 people disappeared for political reasons; in 1978, 23 disappearances were counted and so far in 1979, 65 people have disappeared

When we reflect on each painful case, we realize that the increase in these numbers is no laughing matter. How sad to receive a letter like the following: *I am the mother of Yolanda Menjivar who disappeared on August 15th when she was stopped by the military in El Deviso Amayo, Chalatenango. Since that time we have received no further information about her. She is twenty-five years old and has left behind three children, the oldest being five years old. I am afraid that she will not reappear and that she is dead, but I resist this temptation and do not want to believe that someone has taken her life. She then writes some very inspiring words: We are celebrating the International Year of the Child and so if my daughter does not reappear, what will be the message and the memory that her three children will have of this Year of the Child?**

We continue to insist that as long as there is not a serious study of profound changes of the economic, political and social structures of our country, then the root of all these unjust situations will continue to flourish.*

Unfortunately in the political order we have seen a defense of ORDEN and certain elements have demanded respect for the human rights of ORDEN.¹¹ These people seem to forget that the Organization of American States concluded: *The security forces and the para-military organization, officially called ORDEN, have tortured and physically and psychologically mistreated people*¹². The Organization of American States recommended that this group be dissolved because their way of acting is contrary to human rights.¹³

As I said in my fourth Pastoral Letter, statements like these give us hope because we see that more and more people are aware of the need for urgent and profound changes in our country¹⁴. I want to refer to two interventions that were made on the television program, *Foro Popular* (The Popular Forum). It seems to me that this is a path toward unity that gives us hope for the achievement of the urgent and profound changes that are needed in our country. The political parties have issued a statement about our situation. One of them, the UND, recognizes that the political crisis is based on a confrontation between the people and the government.¹⁵ We have said the same thing on many occasions.* When we have been asked about the conflicts with the Church we have said: *The Church is not against the government, but rather the government is against the people. The Church desires to be with the people and because of this, the Church is persecuted.**

The statement of the political commission of the MLR is most courageous. They refer to two tactics that characterize the repression: *votes and bullets.*¹⁶

I want to speak about the statement of the National Association of Advertisers of El Salvador. They make several suggestions, for example: *Citizens have an obligation to exhort everyone to participate and speak publicly ... newspapers could begin by dedicating a page to an open forum which would invite people to express their opinions ... radio stations could dedicate a half-hour to open microphones for public debate ... television could provide us with interviews with representatives from the different sectors of the community.* This is a very good initiative that the Association (ANAES) puts forth, but unfortunately, in the practical order, we have seen that this is impossible. When we have wanted to publish something that touches on the economic structure, we are opposed by the same advertisers. I was banished by a reporter because the advertisers said it was not advisable for me to write in the newspapers.¹⁷ With this type of freedom how are we going to open the pages of the newspapers or the microphones on the radio and television? Yes, this should be done by the media because with this type of openness all opinions could be heard. YSAX presented this challenge: *When have you seen the publication of an editorial in the press that touches the open wounds of our society? The only things that are published are those that the advertisers allow to be published. Thus, the advertisers have conditioned our publicity and statements. Hopefully this initiative of ANADES finds echo and they should begin with themselves.*

The new scale of daily wages for workers has been published. Those who harvest coffee, 11.00 colones; cotton, 7.00 colones; sugar cane 6.50 colones. It was stated that 11.00 colones is the minimum wage and so why then do other workers only receive 7.00 and 6.50 colones? This inequality creates deficits in the economic life of so many workers. It will be said that those who grow these products cannot pay 11.00 colones but here then we need the good administration of government: if taxes are imposed, these taxes should be used to balance these deficits and not invest millions of colones in useless projects.*

For the knowledge of the *campesinos* I want to tell you about the law governing meals. There are two ways of paying this money: First, giving each worker a pound and a half of prepared corn and four ounces of beans [this should be distributed in three daily rations]; Second, if this is not done on a daily basis, then at the end of the week or every fifteen days each of the above products should be distributed using the same measures as mentioned above. In this situation an additional 0.50 colones will be given to the workers on a daily basis.

Because the *campesinos* are often not made aware of these laws I advise them that if these stipulations regarding their wages and meals are not followed they can have recourse to the Department of Farm Inspection which is located on the third floor in the Department of Labor building. There you can present your complaints. If you are not attended to there, I remind you that our Legal Aid Office supports the *campesinos* and will help you in your claims.*

On September 21st, Dennis McDonald and Fausto Buchelli were abducted. This action has been attributed to the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers. We hope that these men will be promptly released because the demands that they requested are being fulfilled. No organization has taken responsibility for the abduction of Jaime Batle which occurred on September 12th or the abduction of Luis Escalante Arce which occurred on October 6th. An attempt was made to abduct Pedro Mendez Castro but was not accomplished and as a result a member of the security forces and another person were wounded. On my part, I always express my sentiments to the families who suffer and so I call upon those who abuse the freedom of others to respect the life of these individuals. If my intervention in these matters would be helpful, I am at your service.

Problems have occurred in the University which has been called *a sanctuary of terrorism and subversion*. Two statements have been published in response to this accusation. We want to express our solidarity with several of the ideas expressed by the University especially when we consider the fact that the University has to be an echo of the situation in which our country finds itself and because of its emphasis on intellectual matters which distinguishes the University, it has to seek rational solutions that are worthy of the people and our culture.

In their statement we read: *It is unfounded and malicious to assert that the University of El Salvador is generating violence that is the cause of the nation's instability. To say this implies that the primary problem of our country is violence and that therefore, if violence is eliminated so too will the social tensions that we experience be eliminated. If this were true then intervening in the affairs of the University would resolve the problem. It is necessary, however, to reaffirm the fact that the problems that we confront are rooted in the serious social-economic crisis that our people protest, in the strangulation of the people's right to share in political power, and in the continual violation of fundamental human rights as already stated by the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States. It should be remembered that, according to the existing political Constitution, the University of El Salvador is an autonomous institution with regard to both its administration and its teaching. Intervention in the affairs of the University*

*cannot be justified by putting forth the argument of "national security" --- this implies a violation of the Constitution*¹⁸. Therefore, as the Church has pointed out, so too we state that the root of violence should not be sought in secondary causes (even though these exist) but it should be seen that the primary root of our violence is rooted in the structural injustice that our country experiences.

Bodies continue to appear in different parts of the country. I strongly recommend that you read *Orientacion* where we speak about the appearance of several bodies with marks of cruel torture.¹⁹ This week eleven bodies were found.

The social promoter of ISTA, Dalia Arbizú Peña,²⁰ was captured and then machine-gunned. She was six months pregnant and dedicated her life to the promotion of women in the rural areas. It is necessary to investigate and punish such cruel and inhuman assassins.

I also want to denounce the death threats that Dr. Roberto Lara Velado, the President of the Commission on Human Rights, continues to receive. The Vice-President of the same organization has also been threatened.

We also denounce the actions of some political-military movements. ERP has accepted responsibility for planting the bomb that exploded near the house of the District Attorney. FARN took over several radio stations in order to transmit their message. FPL burned about twenty government vehicles and planted bombs in the offices of several Mayors as well as the offices of the Administration of Revenue.

The following people have been arrested but have not been brought before the courts: Marcos Calles arrested in Upattoro, Chalatenango; Mercedes Vitelio, secretary-general of Minerva; Jorge Villalobos, secretary of youth concerns was arrested on October 12th.

We lament the disappearance of Dr. María Teresa Hernández Saballos which occurred on September 15th. Her nine year old son, Vladimir, wrote in *Orientación: Please, free her!*²¹ In our country of such great suffering we even have to beg for freedom.

In the area of labor relations we are saddened by so many disorders. Several labor conflicts continue and some have gone on for more than two months while others seem to be headed in the same direction. COGEFAR (a construction company), APEX, DURAMAS, Arco Ingenieros and Libo are situations of great concern. In several factories hostages have been taken but this is no way to resolve the problem. In several cases management has not expressed their solidarity with the hostages. I invite everyone, those who have promoted the strikes as well as management to look for ways to break these painful impasses. Many family members have come to the Chancery, especially family members of those who are being held as hostages, and have expressed their concern for their loved ones because one of the hostages has a bad heart and others have different physical and/or psychological conditions. Those who have taken these people hostage should be mindful of the fact that *the human person is above all other things and concerns*. Management should do everything possible to seek the intervention of the Department of Labor and participate in the meetings that have been scheduled, meetings which they are often indifferent toward --- they forget that there are many people who are suffering.

We could continue here at length but what we have said provides us with a framework that enables us to hear the Word of God that ought to penetrate the heart of our people. Let us be those people who are going to carry forth this enlightenment of our faith. Let us live the call that Jesus

made to the young man who asked the question that we all ought to ask: will this be the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of sin? What must we do to resolve this present situation? Jesus points out to us a path that each one of us is able to travel: *keep the commandments, live the spirit of poverty and detachment and above all, come and follow me*

Let us follow Jesus and let us believe in him. Let us be sure that God, that Jesus Christ, has the power to save our people if we, instead of turning our backs on him --- like the young man who did not have the courage to follow him --- say to him like Peter: *we have left all, Lord; what can we do for this people?* Surely the Lord will inspire us to know what to do. All the social classes in El Salvador can do much. When Puebla calls on the experts to give special place to wisdom and faith amid their advances in learning, it also makes an appeal to members of government, members of the intellectual and university communities, to scientists, experts and shapers of the technological world, to the directors of the mass media, to artists, jurists, laborers, *campesinos*, businessmen, economists, the military. I want to read this because Medellín already reminded the military (38): *That you have a mission to guarantee rather than inhibit the political liberty of citizens. You should be mindful of your mission, which is to guarantee the peace and security of all. You should never abuse the force you possess. You should be defenders of the force of right and law. You should also foster a societal life that is free, participatory, and pluralistic.**

Let me conclude with these words from the Puebla document: *Let all contribute to the normal working of society. Let professional and business people undertake their mission in a spirit of service to the people who look to them to defend their lives and their rights and to further their welfare* (39). So be it *

¹ See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país* (6 August 1979), 42.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ See "Historia de la inversión pública en El Salvador", Paid advert of the Frente de Contribuyentes Unidos, *El Diario de Hoy*, 13 October 1979.

⁴ Declaration of the Sociedad Dental de El Salvador ante la realidad nacional, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 13 October 1979.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Message to the people of Latin America*, 3.

⁷ General audience of 10 October 1979, *Osservatore Romano*, 14 October 1979.

⁸ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 11 & 12 December 1979.

⁹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, and *El Diario de Hoy*, 9 October 1979.

¹⁰ Reference to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights of the Organisation of American States.

¹¹ Reference to declarations of president Carlos Humberto Romero in an interview granted to three foreign journalists. See "Romero desafía a dirigentes políticos", *El Diario de Hoy*, 11 October 1979.

¹² Report of the Comisión Especial of the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, *ECA* 369-370 (1979), p. 501.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, p. 505.

¹⁴ See *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país* (6 August 1979), 58.

¹⁵ See "Enfrentamiento entre pueblo y Gobierno: centro de la crisis política", Comunicado de la Unión Democrática Nacionalista, *El Diario de Hoy*, 11 October 1979.

¹⁶ See "Elecciones libres y massacre", Comunicado de la Comisión Política del Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario, *El Diario de Hoy*, 12 October 1979.

¹⁷ Since 1977 Mons. Romero used to write a weekly column in the opinion pages of *La Prensa Gráfica*. The last one appeared on 8 June 1979.

¹⁸ See Comunicado de la Junta Directiva de la Asamblea General de la Universidad de El Salvador, *El Diario de Hoy*, 13 October 1979.

¹⁹ See "Denuncias y amenazas", *Orientación*, 14 October 1979.

²⁰ In the papers, her name appears as Dalila Arbízú Peñ. See *El Diario de Hoy* and *La Prensa Gráfica*, 11 October 1979.

²¹ See "Carta de un niño pidiendo libertad para su madre", *Orientación*, 30 September 1979.

Marginal References (1) Heb 3,11; (2) EDx 17,7; (3) Ps 95,7-8; (4) Heb 4,12-13; (5) Mt 19,22; (6) Mk 10,17-19; (7) Mk 10,18; (8) Mk 10,20; (9) Mk 10,21a; (10) Mk 10,21b; (11) Mk 10,21c; (12) Mk 10,22; (13) Mk 10,21a; (14) Mk 10,23; (15) Mk 10,24a; (16) Mk 10,24b; (17) Mk 10,25-27; (18) Mk 10,28-30; (19) ES 28; (20) ES 28; (21) ES 28; (22) ES 28; (23) Mt 25,40; (24) Mk 10,21c; (25) Mk 10,29; (26) Gal 5,13; (27) Mk 10,21c; (28) Heb 4,12; (29) Rm 14,8-9; (30) Ws 7,7-8; (31) Ws 7,9; (32) Ws 7,10a; (33) Ws 7,10b; (34) Ws 7,11; (35) PP 19; (36) Jn 1,14; (37) GS 15; (38) P 1247; (39) P 1249.