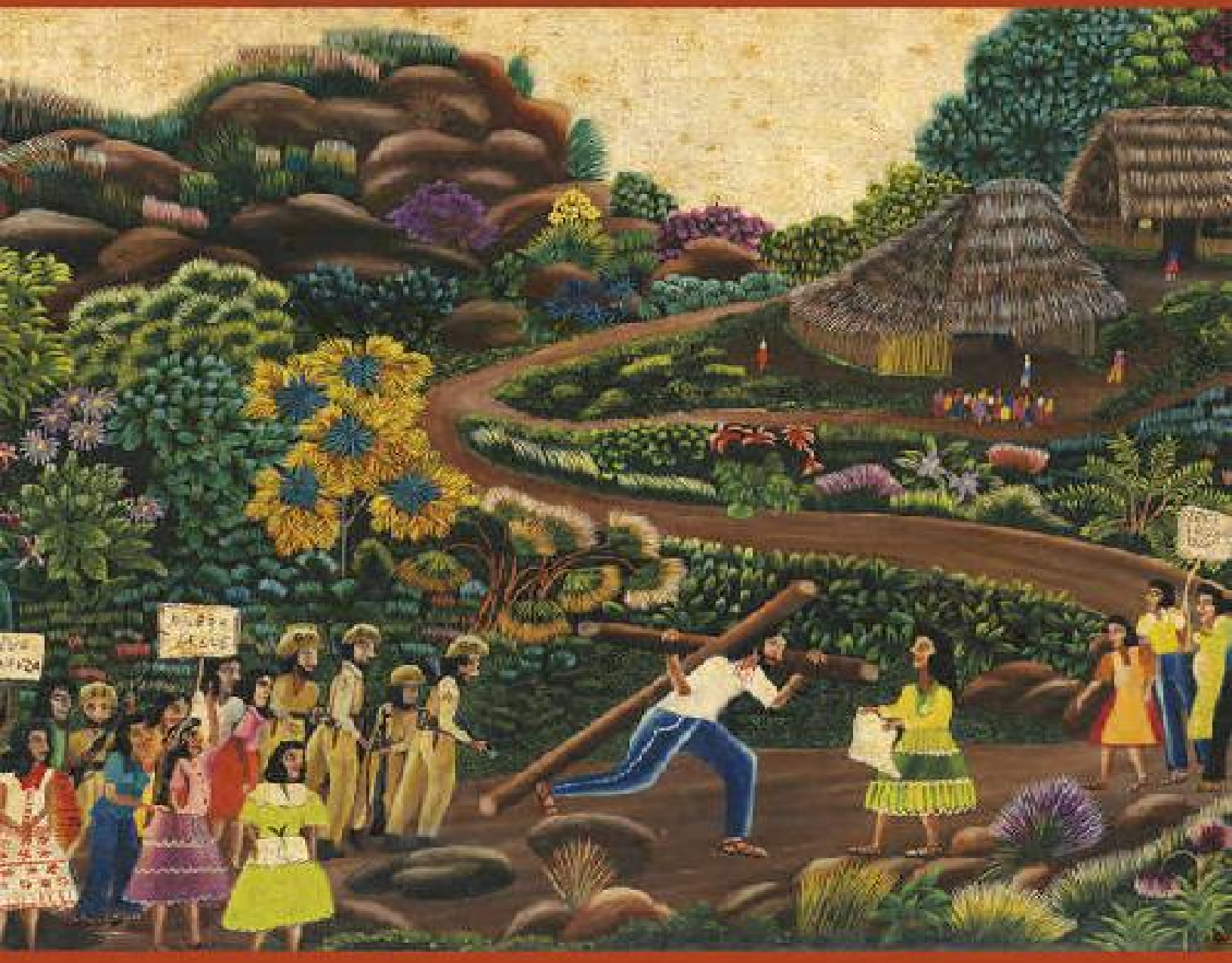
The GOSPEL in SOLENTINAME

Ernesto Cardenal



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Ernesto Cardenal

Translated by Donald D. Walsh

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Introduction

Every Sunday in Solentiname, a remote archipelago in Lake Nicaragua inhabited by *campesinos* (peasants), instead of a sermon we held a dialogue on the gospel reading. The *campesinos'* discussions were often more profound than those of many theologians, but they reflected the simplicity of the gospel readings themselves. That is not surprising. The *gospel*, or good news (good news to the poor), was written for them, by people like them.

Some of my friends urged me not to let those comments be lost, but to collect and publish them in a book. This is that book. I began by collecting them in my memory, for as long as I could. Later, out of a growing sense of practicality, we used three tape recorders so that none of the comments would be lost.

Many of the discussions took place in the church, at the Sunday mass. Others, in a thatched hut we had built across from the church for meetings and shared meals after the mass. Sometimes the mass and gospel dialogues were held outdoors on other islands, or in a small coastal village across the way, which we reached by way of a beautiful river surrounded by exuberant tropical foliage.

First we passed out copies of the gospel to those who could read. Some people couldn't read, especially the elderly and those who lived farthest away from the school. One of the best readers (usually a boy or girl) would read aloud the whole passage that we were going to discuss. Then we talked about it, verse by verse.

We used the Protestant translation, *Dios llega al hombre* from the American Bible Society, which is the best translation of the gospels that I know. The translator is anonymous, but it must have been done by a poet. It is written in the simple language of the Latin American *campesinos,* but with great faithfulness to scripture.

I organized the commentary for publication, not chronologically but in the order of the gospel readings. Often, however, the discussion followed

the same order as the readings.

Naturally I have elaborated on the dialogues from time to time. These are not transcriptions from an anthropological text, but a work of literature. I omitted some of the less interesting or repetitious comments, polished some phrasings, and added things that would enrich the gospel texts; but most of it is just what the *campesinos* said, in their own words, and that is the value of the book. I consider it the best of my books, precisely because I am not its author.

Later I wished that many good dialogues had not disappeared with the wind before we started collecting them. And that we had not lost some through recording failures. But those dialogues are lost only to the book, not to those who took part—who have kept them in some ways, even when they no longer remember them.

There are 38 islands in the archipelago of Solentiname; some are very small, and only the largest of them are inhabited. The population is around 1,000 people, in about 90 families. Most of the houses are made of straw, scattered widely along the shore of each island. Our small community or commune, Nuestra Señora de Solentiname, was at one end of the largest island. The Colombian poet William Agudelo and his wife Teresita were members, along with their two small children, Irene and Juan; also some young men born on the island: Alejandro, Elvis and Laureano. There was very little communication beyond the island, so our contemplation was seldom disturbed in this secluded spot, away from the tourist and trade routes.

Not everyone who lived on these islands came to mass. Some didn't come for lack of a boat. Others, because we didn't have devotions to the saints as they were accustomed to doing. Others were influenced by anticommunist propaganda, and perhaps also by fear.

Not everyone who came participated equally in the discussion. Some spoke up more often than others. Marcelino was a mystic. Olivia was more theological. Rebeca, Marcelino's wife, always talked about love. Laureano saw everything in terms of the revolution. Elvis was always thinking about the perfect society of the future. Felipe, another youth, was constantly aware of the proletarian struggle. His father, old Tomas Peña, couldn't read but spoke out of a deep wisdom. Alejandro, Olivia's son, was a youth leader; he had guidance to offer everyone, especially other young people. Pancho was a conservative, but later took a different position. Julio Mairena

was a staunch defender of equality. His brother Oscar always talked about unity. They, and all the others who often spoke up and had important things to say, and those who spoke little but also said important things, along with William and Teresita and our other companions who took part in the dialogues, are the authors of this book.

More importantly, the true author is the Spirit who inspired these comments—the *campesinos* of Solentiname knew very well that it was the Spirit who made them speak—the same Spirit who inspired the gospels. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of God infused throughout the community: Oscar called it the spirit of unity, Alejandro called it the spirit of service to others, Elvis called it the spirit of the future society, Felipe called it the spirit of the proletarian struggle, Julio called it the spirit of equality and community sharing, Laureano called it the spirit of the revolution, and Rebeca called it the spirit of love.

These discussions took place during the Somoza dictatorship; the dictatorship was always a part of them, along with the hope that liberation would soon come. I have called them marxist commentaries on the gospel, interpreting the gospel in light of the revolution. Naturally this book was banned in Nicaragua; a friend of mine in the customs office showed me a flyer that was sent to all the border checkpoints, forbidding its importation as a pernicious book that "uses the gospel to promote communism among the people."

The Gospel in Solentiname was published in many countries and many languages, even in Japan and the Philippines. In the United States it was used most of all as readings in mass and liturgical services, I believe more by Protestants than by Catholics; it often became a model for congregational discussions of the scriptures.

I remember that one U.S. publication compiled commentaries on the gospel from different parts of the world, following the Solentiname model. I noticed that the commentary from one congregation in Poland was altogether different from ours. What we said about the Somozas in Nicaragua, they said about the communists; in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, they portrayed the communist hierarchy as the Pharisee. I kept that publication in the library at Solentiname, but it was lost when the Somoza army destroyed our community.

All of us in the community were radicalized by these discussions of the gospel. Little by little we came to identify with the revolutionary movement

in Nicaragua, until at some point we became a part of it. Some of the young people wanted to leave the community and become guerrilla fighters. I was having a hard time holding them back. They didn't go then, in part because of a message from a legendary guerrilla leader, Commander Marcos, saying that we had to hold the Solentiname community together; it was important to the revolution in social, political and military, tactical and strategic terms.

We soon found out why he said military; that was when the youth of the community were called to participate in the armed struggle, attacking the army barracks in nearby San Carlos as part of a general insurrection. After training in secret, some boys and girls from the community and other *compañeros* overran the barracks at San Carlos, but had to withdraw because the insurrection didn't take place as planned in other places. Some of the people who were discussing the gospel in this book took part in that action: Alejandro, Laureano, Felipe, Donald, Elvis, Julio Ramon, Gloria, Myriam, Ivan, and Bosco. The Somoza army razed our community in retaliation, and I had to go into exile with the other people of Solentiname, although I had not taken part in the armed action.

From Costa Rica I wrote a “Letter to the people of Nicaragua” that said:

> The Gospel teaches us that the word of God is not only to be heard, but to be put in practice. The *campesinos* of Solentiname who were exploring this Gospel could not fail to feel solidarity with their brother and sister *campesinos* who were suffering persecution and terror in other parts of the country: they were being imprisoned, tortured, murdered, their wives were being raped, their houses were burned, they were thrown out of helicopters. They also had to feel solidarity with all those who were offering their lives out of compassion for their neighbors. To make this solidarity real, they also needed to risk their safety and their lives. In Solentiname we knew that those who put the word of God into practice would not always have peace and tranquility. We knew that the hour of sacrifice was coming, and that hour is now.

On the day of triumph of the revolution, a large number of people went to see the bunker that Somoza abandoned in his precipitous flight. Among them was a cousin of mine, who picked up from Somoza's night table a copy of *The Gospel in Solentiname* in English. She gave it to me and I still

have it, with some passages underlined and a few brief notes, written by his hand in the margins. Curiously, one of the underlined passages was a comment by the young *campesino* Pablo, who said of Herod in the chapter on the arrival of the magi: “He must have felt hatred and envy. Because dictators have always believed they were gods. They think they are the only ones, and cannot allow anyone to be above them.”

After the triumph of the revolution, everything was rebuilt that had been destroyed in our community. Many people had come to visit before, but now there are many more (some almost in a spirit of pilgrimage), although the community that made these commentaries no longer exists. There are two rustic hotels, a historic district where the community used to be, and one can also obtain modest lodging in some of the *campesinos’* homes.

This book speaks about a particular situation that Nicaragua experienced, and about the international situation of the time, when one half of the world believed in communism. That reality has changed a great deal, but I think that the book has not gone out of date; it is still as valid as the gospel itself. The utopia of that time is the same as it is now, and has been ever since the time of the prophets. More people than ever have faith and hope for a better world, and I believe that those who don't should have them too.

This book shows that what we said years ago by the lake in Solentiname is still fresh and new.

Among the people who discussed the gospel in Solentiname, Felipe, Elvis and Donald became martyrs of the revolution before the triumph; later, Laureano and Alejandro. They are buried beside the little church where we held the dialogues—except for Felipe, who was buried symbolically because we don't know what happened to his body; he was last seen carrying an injured person, being chased by the soldiers. For each of them there is a stone, engraved with words spoken in these commentaries about the resurrection. Beside them is a steel sculpture several meters high which I made, a stylized image of the red and black flag of Sandino. At its base are Sandino's words: “Our flag is red upon black. The black is death; the red, resurrection.”

Ernesto Cardenal
Translated by Margaret Wilde

1.

The Prologue to the Gospel of Saint John

(John 1:1–18)

MANUEL read the Prologue aloud. Then we commented on each verse:

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*

There was a long silence. Afterwards FELIPE spoke: “Christ brought a message from God that was very important for the people, and that meant that he was the Word. But it wasn't just any word. It was a serious word, which didn't deceive. He is the word of God and so he's a true word. And this word came into the world, and has remained among us.”

ALEJANDRO: “I think that when they call Christ the Word it's because God expresses himself through him. He expresses himself to denounce oppression, to say: ‘Here there is injustice, here there is evil, there are rich and poor, the earth belongs to a few.’ And to announce a new life, a new truth, in a word: a social change. With that word God frees us.”

I said that was very clear. Throughout the Bible God had been denouncing injustices and announcing a just society, and that had been the word of God. What was new was that the denunciation now came in flesh and blood, in the person of Jesus Christ.

LEONEL asked: “When it says ‘in the beginning’ does it refer to the beginning of the world or of his life?”

I said the beginning of the world. Saint John begins his Gospel with the words with which Genesis opens—“in the beginning…,”—as if he wanted to tell a new story of the creation.

And LEONEL said: “Then that word is like the promise. Because God had created us with the promise of a Messiah, isn't that so?”

Then spoke my friend ANTIDIO CABAL, who had come from Venezuela: “Here it seems to me that ‘Word’ has several meanings, and we should look for the first meaning first and afterwards we can find the rest. What is the first meaning of ‘Word’ here? Probably the text itself tells us. I see that here it says: ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ That in God there already existed what he now has communicated to us through Christ. And then it says at the end of this prologue: ‘Nobody has ever seen God; his only son, who lives in close communion with the Father, is the one who has made him known.’ So it seems to me that the first meaning of Christ as Word is that he tells us who God is; because men do not know him because they have not seen him and what is not seen or touched is not known. And so the function of that word is to tell who God is and what God is like. And he has told us that God is justice and that he is on the side of the poor. Christ explained this through his life and his acts, like a single continuous word until his death, and the word, even after his death, goes on being repeated…. I have a great fear of talking because I have been very corrupted by the university.”

ANTIDIO stopped brusquely. There was a silence, and then I said that, in fact, “word” means “communication.” With it we communicate with one another, as we are doing now. And that God also wished to communicate with us and that he has done so in the person of Jesus Christ. That is why he is the Word of God, the communication between God and man.

FELIX, a middle-aged *campesino*, spoke: “The word is also teaching, for example, what I teach my son.”

And OSCAR: “The word of God is also his command: that we must love each other.”

And young JULIO: “The word, I say, is a thing that one guy says and another guy hears it. And so the word of God is for us to hear. And also for us to respond to…”

MARCELINO, Julio's father: “I've read in the Scriptures that the word of God is like a seed. Why? A seed you cast it to the wind and it multiplies. And we eat from it. So this word should be multiplied in us. And produce a food. And we should share that food.”

We went on to the second verse.

In the beginning, then, he was with God.

ALEJANDRO commented: “He repeats the same thing again, that the Word was with God. He wants to stress it. He's saying that God was talking from the beginning. Who with? With God. God is a community of persons, and therefore a dialogue. Now God talks with people. This word of God is Jesus Christ. He makes us love each other. It's the word of love.”

> *Through him God made all things; nothing that exists was made without him*.

LEONEL: “Naturally. Because God and his word are the same thing. Everything he created he created through his word and everything that Christ said on earth was about the work of God. Or better, God created us to communicate with us, and afterwards he sent us his word.”

ANTIDIO: “It says that God did everything by means of him. And the Bible also says that God created the world by means of his word: heaven, the earth, the waters, the animals. To create and to speak is the same thing. To create is a way of communicating. In creating you make something known, like when you write a poem or a song, or when these painters of Solentiname, like Oscar or Eduardo, paint a picture, or when a carpenter makes a table. Every worker becomes known through his creation. And when he created light and the stars, the heaven and the earth, God was expressing himself, he was communicating.”

I said that the Greek word the Bible uses to say “creation” is *poema*. Because in reality creation and poem are the same thing. The world is God's poem. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light, and so with all the rest, because God created by means of his word. His word became reality. God's poem is reality.

And ANTIDIO went on: “And you always create what you need. Or to say it another way: You create good. And the reality that God created was good. He saw that everything was good. Evil, on the other hand, is the destruction of what is created.”

ALEJANDRO: “The worker is the image of God, and everything he produces is good. It enriches man.”

I said: “That's the greatness of the worker. The things that we have have been made by God and afterwards by workers. The shoes we wear were made by workers. The clothes, by other workers. The cities and everything in them and the highways and the bridges…”

I was interrupted by a little man with ragged clothes who sat timidly in a corner of the church, away from everyone, and whom I didn't know (he seemed to me to be a foreigner): “All those things come from the power of the Father, and the Father gave that power to the Son, and the power of the Son is also our power.”

FELIPE: “It's the greatness of the workers. The workers continue the power of God on earth by working on creation. That's why the workers should be the owners of the earth and not the ones who don't do any work—the ones who have shoes and food and clothing and travel everywhere and don't work or sow or produce anything. But they own the work of the others and the houses and the lands…”

> *In him was life, and this life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness; and the darkness cannot put it out*.

FELIPE spoke again: “It's by lies that the exploiters have made themselves masters of everything, by deceiving the workers. That's why the Word of God came to free us from this deceit.”

MANUEL: “It says that in him was life and that life is light. We already know that God is love. Love and life are the same thing, because love produces life, and hate produces death. But here on earth love is in the midst of evil. Evil is struggling against love. Lying and deceit are struggling against truth. And Christ brought us love and truth, which is light, so that we too can win over darkness.”

THE LITTLE STRANGER: “God said ‘let there be light’ through his Son and afterwards he sent us his Son to give us a new light that helps us understand these words.”

> *The true light that lights all men was coming into the world. The Word was in the world, and even though God made the world by means of him, those in the world did not accept him. He came to his own world, but his own did not accept him*.

PANCHO: “They didn't accept him because he looked poor and they felt they were more important. Also because he talked against injustice, which is sin, and they were unjust.”

ADAN: “And they still haven't accepted him. The proof: everything we're seeing, a society full of injustice.”

ALEJANDRO: “God made matter by means of his Word, but there are certain people who are enemies of matter, and they're destroying it with injustice. Now I understand better a poem that Ernesto read to us last night, about the stars, that said that all matter is moved by the law of attraction, which is the law of love itself. I say this social system is in conflict with reality. And that's why the exploiters don't want us to see social reality. People who are enemies of reality are the ones who don't accept him.”

THE LITTLE MAN: “In the Church itself many still don't accept him. What the light of Christ often finds in the Church is only darkness. Just as during his life there were people who didn't accept him, his word continues now to be unwelcome. That's why there's injustice.”

Yet some men accepted him and believed in him; to these he gave the right to become children of God.

THE LITTLE MAN: “Not all of us are children of God. We're children of God only when we accept him. Then we're newly begotten. Born again, we are children of God.”

OSCAR: “The way I see it, not all people are children of God. It seems that the ones who aren't children of God are the ones who produce lies and are selfish and do injustices. Those are the ones who are set apart.”

I recalled that Christ had called those who did not welcome him “children of the devil.” And the devil he identifies with the lie: “Father of the lie.”

And ELVIS said: “That means that the new birth is when a person is transformed. He changes his mentality. And he begins to do good. That's accepting him.”

FELIPE: “I see here that it says that he gave them the right to be children of God. It seems that he gave them the right to do what they want: to transform the world, to create reality as they believe it is just. But there is a struggle between these people and the others, between those who want to change reality and those who don't want to. The same struggle that there was between Jesus and the ones who didn't accept him.”

PANCHO: “We're the children of God because we're all brothers. If you draw back from brotherhood you're not a child of God. Anyone who's not your brother is not a child of your father.”

THE LITTLE MAN: “People who received his word received the same spirit that begot him, and therefore they are his brothers, children of the same Father.”

FELIX: “To love your neighbor is to be a child of God. Anyone who doesn't accept the Word of God is the one who rejects that commandment of love, and so he's no child of God.”

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of love and truth.

I explained that in Greek the expression is very beautiful: “The Word pitched its tent in our midst.” And it recalls the time of the exodus when the Jews lived in tents. It means that with Christ God began to live in the midst of our camp. As if we were to say here: “He built his hut in our midst.”

THE LITTLE MAN: “Jesus Christ is the word, or the speaker for God, his living word here on earth. That word is for changing the world, and it's a powerful word because with it the world was made. And people who speak with the word of Christ are also powerful. They say anything and it's done.”

FELIPE: “You have to keep in mind that they are doing what God cannot do. God gave power to people so he could continue his work here. What people can do on earth God's not going to do. Let's not try to have God do it. What's important is to know that we can do it.”

I: “The fact is that as God became man, now man is God. First God became flesh in a person, Jesus Christ, to become flesh afterwards in all the poor and oppressed in history. The Word is now the people. It's the people that do the work of God.”

FELIPE: “With no need for God to do it.”

I: “God doesn't have anything to do here any more. The work of creation was begun by him but now he's left it in our hands, so that we can continue the work.”

OSCAR: “Since God doesn't have anything to do here any more, it seems we have a great responsibility to fix the world, so that people who are separated from him and who aren't his children can be persuaded by us and begin to be his children also so we can all be united as brothers. This should be our struggle: to make us all one.”

LAUREANO: “It's up to us to fix the world, to establish justice on earth, to make the Revolution.”

For the law was given through Moses, but love and truth come through Jesus Christ.

JULIO: “Here love is mentioned next to truth. Truth is very important because when there's no truth there's no love.”

ROBERTO: “The opposite of truth is deceit. When we don't tell the truth we're cheating. We're exploiting, you could also say.”

ALEJANDRO: “Exploitation is the opposite of truth. We're filled with exploitation because we're filled with lies. They've made us believe that evil is good. They've deceived us with propaganda.”

GLORIA: “Exploitation exists, but it's not called exploitation. It's called justice.”

I: “And robbery is called private property. We've seen then that love and truth are the same thing. And injustice and lies are the same thing. Here it says that the law came through Moses, but that didn't change the world because it was only a law—a religious commandment, we might call it. But with Jesus Christ came a real thing, which is love and truth. And here we're also told what is the nature of that Word that became flesh: the Word is love and truth.”

Nobody has ever seen God; his only Son, who lives in close communion with the Father, is the one who has made him known.

ELVIS: “He's shown us what God is like because he's shown us that God is love, and to have God on earth is to have unity.”

GLORIA: “No one has seen him, but we have heard his Word which is love, and this Word has made us know God.”

RAFAEL: “It's all clear.”

And I ended by saying: “It's all clear, as Rafael has said. What we've read here is also the word of God, just as Jesus Christ is the Word of God. The passage that we have commented on is one of the most difficult in the Gospels, and now we see it very clearly. This is because it was made clear for us by Christ himself, who is present in our midst. As we have seen here in the words of Saint John, he is the light that lightens all people. He became man in order to make us know God.”

2.

The Annunciation

(Luke 1:26–36)

This commentary was made in the meeting hut. First we had a lunch of rice and beans and turtle cooked by Natalia, the mother of Elvis and Milagros. The Gospel was read by Gloria, one of the youngest girls. And afterwards we commented on the verses.

> *The angel came into the place where she was and said to her: "I congratulate you, God-favored one! The Lord is with you; God has blessed you more than all other women."*

I told them that that was the beginning of the Hail Mary and that the angel's first words used to be translated as a greeting (that's what "Hail, Mary" means). But now it's been discovered that the true translation is "I congratulate you." And the prophets often congratulated "the daughter of Zion" (the people of Israel) in this way because she was going to give birth to a Messiah.

Old TOMAS PEÑA said: "The angel congratulates her because she's going to be the mother of the Messiah and he congratulates all of us because he means that the savior is not going to be born among the rich but right among us, the poor people."

FELIX: "The thing is that the liberator had to be born among the oppressed."

JULIO: "It's because he came to liberate the oppressed. That's why he had to be one of them. If he had come to liberate the rich, he would have been born among the rich…"

PABLO: “It's not the rich but the poor who need liberation. The exploiters aren't the ones who are going to be liberated…”

OSCAR: “They'll be liberated from their exploitation.”

OLIVIA: “The rich and the poor will be liberated. Us poor people are going to be liberated from the rich. The rich are going to be liberated from themselves, that is, from their wealth. Because they're more slaves than we are.”

> *But when she saw the angel, she was surprised at his words, and wondered why he greeted her that way. Then the angel said to her, “Mary, do not fear, for you have found favor with God*.

TOMAS PEÑA said: “She must have been scared. She was very humble, a poor little girl, and she's frightened when they tell her she's going to be so important.”

Young ALEJANDRO: “But there's no reason to be afraid of that. We also could be afraid of being important, because we have to have an important mission too—perhaps being leaders, some of us,…to liberate others, to carry out a mission in the community and even outside of Solentiname, in San Miguelito, San Carlos, we don't know.”

> *Now you are going to be pregnant, and you will bear a son, and you will name him Jesus*.

I told them that “Jesus” was a name that was usually translated as “Savior” or “Salvation,” but that now it was better translated as “Liberator” or “Liberation.” The Hebrew name is *Jeshua*, which means “Yahweh liberates” or “Yahweh is liberation.”

Someone said: “That angel was being subversive just by announcing that. It's as though someone here in Somoza's Nicaragua was announcing a liberator…”

And another added: “And Mary joins the ranks of the subversives, too, just by receiving that message. I suppose that by doing that she probably felt herself entering into a kind of underground. The birth of the liberator had to be kept secret. It would be known only by the most trusted friends and a few of the poor people around there, villagers. We have to keep in mind that they were under an oppression. And even the name ‘Jesus’ was a dangerous name…”

Another said: “And it's still a dangerous name. And we who are saying that name ‘Liberation’ or ‘Liberator,’ we're being subversive too…”

He will be great, and will be called the Son of God the Highest; and the Lord God will make him King like his forefather David, so that he may govern the nation of Israel forever, and his reign will never end.

WILLIAM said: “In the Bible, ‘God the Highest’ had always revealed himself as the liberator of the people. He made himself known first when Moses screwed the Pharaoh. And later, through the prophets, he stood fighting against all oppression. His son, this Jesus, the Yahweh Liberator, will be like him. And he's going to be king.”

OSCAR: “The angel announces that a new government begins with him. It's the kingdom of the poor. This kingdom has been establishing itself since Christ came to earth, but it still hasn't been fully established.”

JULIO: “I would say it's hardly begun.”

Young LAUREANO: “In the socialist countries the poor person is already king.”

Then Mary asked the angel, “How can this happen, since I am not living with any man?”

MARCELINO: “It's as if the town of Solentiname asked: ‘How can any leader, any liberator, come from us if we're ignorant, if nobody goes to the university and many of us don't even know how to read, if there's only a few of us, and if we don't even have any resources…?’”

The angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come over you, and the power of God the Highest will wrap you like a cloud.”

I told them that we already know that the Holy Spirit is the same as saying the “spirit of God” (in the sense of “God's way of being” or “God's character”) and it's also the same as saying “Love.” And I told them that the Church has called this Holy Spirit “Father of the poor.”

Young JULIO said: “So it's the spirit of justice, because it's Love. The spirit of social justice, the spirit of change, Revolution. Jesus was born from this spirit.”

And NATALIA, who had been the midwife at the births of almost all these young people: “Jesus is the son of Mary and of Love.”

And OLIVIA, the mother of Gloria and Alejandro: “Then Mary married Love, or the Spirit of Love.”

I said: “Like each of us is destined to marry this same love.”

Then Mary said, “I am the slave of the Lord; let God do with me as you have told me.” And with this the angel went away.

TOMAS: “That shows she's very humble. She feels like a poor, humble little thing, instead of feeling proud because of what they told her.”

NATALIA: “She was a woman of the people like us.”

ALEJANDRO: “It seems to me that here we should admire above all her obedience. And so we should be ready to obey too. This obedience is revolutionary, because it's obedience to love. Obedience to love is very revolutionary, because it commands us to disobey everything else.”

3.

An Angel Talks to Joseph

(Matthew 1:18–25)

In the meeting hut Teresita read the Gospel and we went on to comment on the first verses:

> *The birth of Jesus Christ was this way: Mary, his mother, was engaged to marry Joseph, and before they lived together, she was found pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her husband, was a just man, but he did not want to denounce her publicly; he preferred to leave her without people knowing about it.*

PANCHO: "This Joseph was a good man: he didn't say anything bad about Mary or fight with her or become violent. He didn't wish her any harm."

MARCELINO: "I've been thinking about his suffering. He must have loved her. She was his fiancée, she was engaged to marry him. And he sees she's been unfaithful to him. He must have been very jealous. In cases like this there are men who feel they have to be real hemen and get vengeance for the insult. Sometimes they kill the woman. But Joseph, he sees the woman is not for him, and he just suffers in silence."

> *And while he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said to him, "Joseph, descendant of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, because the son that she is going to have is the son of the Holy Spirit."*

ALEJANDRO: “He had a great faith in God, because when the angel told him this, he believed it. Another man might not have swallowed it so easily.”

TERESITA: “He also had faith in Mary, not just in God. Because he knew that she was a good woman, that she was a saint. That's why it was so easy for him to believe in God who spoke to him through the mouth of the angel.”

NATALIA: “And his joy when he knew that Mary's son was going to be the Messiah, that he was going to liberate many people. He accepted him then as his son. With joy.”

JOSE ESPINOSA: “But also with pain. If the people were going to be liberated, there would have to be suffering too. He knew what was in store for the son and the whole family. He accepted with joy. But maybe he had second thoughts. I see that the angel says to him: ‘Do not fear to take Mary.’ When he took Mary he was accepting the responsibility of being the foster-father of the Messiah. And that, I say, is no cinch.”

ALEJANDRO: “And this is a lesson for many parents of young people around here, who are afraid when their children begin to get involved in liberating the community. Because here the young people are also like messiahs of the community, the ones who get involved and risk suffering for others. And maybe their parents will have to suffer because of them. And the parents shouldn't be afraid.”

She will have a son, and will name him Jesus. He will be called Jesus because he is going to save his people from their sins.

JOSE CHAVARRIA: “Jesus means ‘Liberator’ or ‘Liberation,’ as we've seen. Although the Jews were waiting for a political liberator…”

“And was Jesus a political liberator or wasn't he?” I asked.

JOSE CHAVARRIA: “He wasn't political. The angel told Joseph clearly: ‘He's going to save his people from their sins.’”

MARCELINO: “I don't agree. Christ was a political liberator who came to free us from oppression. Because to free from sins means to free people from selfishness, to make people love each other. And if people love each other there's no more oppression. And so Christ came to give us political freedom too.”

And JOSE ESPINOSA: “If there's liberation it's because there's injustice. If there's injustice it's because there's sin. Sin or injustice is all the same.”

I said that it seemed to me that Christ's liberation is also political but different from the liberation that the Jews were expecting. What they were expecting was not true liberation: a Messiah who would seize power and become a king like any other. True political liberation is from sin, or injustice, which is the same thing.

> *All this happened in order to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “A virgin will be pregnant, and will have a son, who will be called Emmanuel, which means, God with us.”*

JULIO: “This name that's given to the Messiah means ‘God with the poor.’ Because if the world is divided into rich people and poor people, he can't be on both sides and if he's on one side he has to be with the poor, with us.”

OLIVIA: “Of course. God can't be with the poor and with the rich at the same time, because a person can't be with God and with riches at the same time.”

> *When Joseph awoke from his dream, he did as the angel of the Lord had ordered him, and took Mary as his wife. But they did not live as man and wife until she bore her son, and he named him Jesus*.

RAFAEL: “The important thing here is to see Joseph's consent to be the father of the Messiah. He agrees to take part in the liberation…”

OSCAR: “For me the important thing is that he was a carpenter, one of the people, one of us poor people. And later they threw it in Jesus’ face that he was the son of these people. He couldn't teach people anything because he was the son of poor people.”

ALEJANDRO: “Like they would say now in the city to somebody who's the son of a butcher, or of a bricklayer and a fishwife.”

JULIO: “Why do you suppose people think that poor people can't teach anything? But Jesus showed that poor people can teach. And also that liberation comes from the poor.”

FELIPE: “What I see is that since God created the world people have been divided into rich and poor, and the rich don't believe in the poor and are against the poor.”

I said not “since God created the world,” because he created people equal, but since we've organized society, because we've organized it badly.

OSCAR: “Then we have to organize society in a more logical way, right? Like the animals, which are all equal. I look at the birds, for example. They're different and they have different abilities, but you don't have some exploiting others. It seems to me that God wants us to be like that. That's why a liberator was needed and that's why this Jesus came, who is God among us.”

LAUREANO: “Here it says, ‘When Joseph awoke.’ Does that mean then he was asleep? Did he dream all that, then, and it wasn't an angel that spoke to him?”

It could be a dream, I said, or a vision, or some other way of understanding things, and for the Bible it's the same as saying that it was an angel that spoke to him. And these angels are still talking to us.

4.

The Song of Mary

(Luke 1:46–55)

We came to the Song of Mary, the *Magnificat*, traditionally known by that name because it is the first word in the Latin. It is said that this passage of the Gospel terrified the Russian Czars, and Maurras was very right in talking about the "revolutionary germ" of the *Magnificat*.

The pregnant Mary had gone to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who also was pregnant. Elizabeth congratulated her because she would be the mother of the Messiah, and Mary broke out singing that song. It is a song to the poor. The people of Nicaragua have been very fond of reciting it. It is the favorite prayer of the poor, and superstitious *campesino*s often carry it as an amulet. In the time of old Somoza when the *campesino*s were required always to carry with them proof they had voted for him, the people jokingly called that document the *Magnificat*.

Now young ESPERANZA read this poem, and the women began to comment on it.

> *My soul praises the Lord, my heart rejoices in God my Savior, because he has noticed his slave*.

"She praises God because the Messiah is going to be born, and that's a great event for the people."

"She calls God 'Savior' because she knows that the Son that he has given her is going to bring liberation."

"She's full of joy. Us women must also be that way, because in our community the Messiah is born too, the liberator."

“She recognizes liberation…. We have to do the same thing. Liberation is from sin, that is, from selfishness, from injustice, from misery, from ignorance—from everything that's oppressive. That liberation is in our wombs too, it seems to me…”

The last speaker was ANDREA, a young married woman, and now OSCAR, her young husband, breaks in: “God is selfish because he wants us to be his slaves. He wants our submission. Just him. I don't see why Mary has to call herself a slave. We should be free! Why just him? That's selfishness.”

ALEJANDRO, who is a bachelor: “We have to be slaves of God, not of men.”

Another young man: “God is love. To be a slave of love is to be free because God doesn't make slaves. He's the only thing we should be slaves of, love. And then we don't make slaves of others.”

ALEJANDRO’S MOTHER says: “To be a slave of God is to serve others. That slavery is liberation.”

I said that it's true that this selfish God Oscar spoke about does exist. And it's a God invented by people. People have often invented a god in their own image and likeness—not the true God, but idols, and those religions are alienating, an opium of the people. But the God of the Bible does not teach religion, but rather he urges Moses to take Israel out of Egypt, where the Jews were working as slaves. He led them from colonialism to liberty. And later God ordered that among those people no one could hold another as a slave, because they had been freed by him and they belonged only to him, which means they were free.

And TERESITA, William's wife: “We have to keep in mind that at the time when Mary said she was a slave, slavery existed. It exists today too, but with a different name. Now the slaves are the proletariat or the *campesino*s. When she called herself a slave, Mary brought herself closer to the oppressed, I think. Today she could have called herself a proletarian or a *campesina* of Solentiname.”

And WILLIAM: “But she says she's a slave of the Lord (who is the Liberator, who is the one who brought freedom from the Egyptian slavery). It's as if she said she was a slave of the liberation. Or as if she said that she was a proletarian or a revolutionary *campesina.”*

Another of the girls: “She says she's poor, and she says that God took into account the ‘poverty of his slave,’ that is, that God chose her because she was poor. He didn't choose a queen or a lady of high society but a

woman from the people. Yes, because God has preferred us poor people. Those are the ‘great things’ that God has done, as Mary says.”

And from now on all generations will call me happy, for Mighty God has done great things for me. His name is holy, and his love reaches his faithful ones from generation to generation.

One of the ladies: “She says that people will call her happy…. She feels happy because she is the mother of Jesus the Liberator, and because she also is a liberator like her son, because she understood her son and did not oppose his mission. She didn't oppose him, unlike other mothers of young people who are messiahs, liberators of their communities. That was her great merit, I say.”

And another: “She says that God is holy, and that means ‘just.’ The just person who doesn't offend anybody, the one who doesn't commit any injustices. God is like this and we should be like him.”

I said that was a perfect biblical definition of the holiness of God. And then I asked what a holy society would be.

“The one we are seeking,” LAUREANO answered at once. He is a young man who talks of the Revolution or revolutionaries almost every time he comments on the Bible. After a brief pause he added: “The one that revolutionaries want to build, all the revolutionaries of the world.”

He has shown the strength of his arm; he conquers those with proud hearts.

Old TOMAS, who can't read but who always talks with great wisdom: “They are the rich, because they think they are above us and they look down on us. Since they have the money…. And a poor person comes to their house and they won't even turn around to look at him. They don't have anything more than we do, except money. Only money and pride, that's all they have that we don't.”

ANGEL says: “I don't believe that's true. There are humble rich people and there are proud poor people. If we weren't proud we wouldn't be divided, and us poor are divided.”

LAUREANO: “We're divided because the rich divide us. Or because a poor person often wants to be like a rich one. He yearns to be rich, and then he's

an exploiter in his heart, that is, the poor person has the mentality of the exploiter.”

OLIVIA: “That's why Mary talks about people with proud hearts. It's not a matter of having money or not, but of having the mentality of an exploiter or not.”

I said that nevertheless it cannot be denied that in general the rich person is a proud man, not the poor one.

And TOMAS said: “Yes, because the poor person doesn't have anything. What has he got to be proud of? That's why I said that the rich are proud, because they have the money. But that's the only thing they have we don't have, money and the pride that goes with having money.”

> *He pulls down the mighty from their thrones and raises up the humble. He fills the hungry with good things and he leaves the rich with nothing*.

One said: “The mighty is the same as the rich. The mighty are rich and the rich are mighty.”

And another: “The same as proud, because the mighty and the rich are proud.”

TERESITA: “Mary says that God raised up the humble. That's what he did to Mary.”

And MARIITA: “And what he did to Jesus who was poor and to Mary, and to all the others who followed Jesus, who were poor.”

I asked what they thought Herod would have said if he had known that a woman of the people had sung that God had pulled down the mighty and raised up the humble, filled the hungry with good things and left the rich with nothing.

NATALIA laughed and said: “He'd say she was crazy.”

ROSITA: “That she was a communist.”

LAUREANO: “The point isn't that they would just *say* the Virgin was a communist. She *was* a communist.”

“And what would they say in Nicaragua if they heard what we're saying here in Solentiname?”

Several voices: “That we're communists.”

Someone asked: “That part about filling the hungry with good things?”

A young man answered: “The hungry are going to eat.”

And another: “The Revolution.”

LAUREANO: “That is the Revolution. The rich person or the mighty is brought down and the poor person, the one who was down, is raised up.”

Still another: “If God is against the mighty, then he has to be on the side of the poor.”

ANDREA, Oscar's wife, asked: “That promise that the poor would have those good things, was it for then, for Mary's time, or would it happen in our time? I ask because I don't know.”

One of the young people answered: “She spoke for the future, it seems to me, because we are just barely beginning to see the liberation she announces.”

He helps the nation of Israel his servant, in remembrance of his love; as he had promised to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever.

ALEJANDRO: “That nation of Israel that she speaks about is the new people that Jesus formed, and we are this people.”

WILLIAM: “It's the people who will be liberated, like before the other people were liberated from the dictatorship of Egypt, where they were treated like shit, changed into cheap hand labor. But the people can't be liberated by others. They must liberate themselves. God can show the way to the Promised Land, but the people themselves must begin the journey.”

OSCAR asked: “Can you take riches from the rich by force? Christ didn't force the rich young man. He said to him: ‘If you wish…’”

I thought for a while before answering. I said hesitantly: “You might let him go to another country…”

WILLIAM: “But not let him take his wealth with him.”

FELIPE: “Yes, let him take it.”

The last remark was from MARIITA: “Mary sang here about equality. A society with no social classes. Everyone alike.”

5.

The Birth of Jesus

(Luke 2:6–7)

> *And it happened that while they were in Bethlehem the time came for Mary to give birth. She bore her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in the manger because there was no room for them in the inn.*

At midnight we were in the little church in Solentiname celebrating Christmas Mass. The day before Managua had been destroyed by the earthquake. I told them that the wealth of the country was concentrated there alongside the greatest misery in the country. Certainly the Christmas that they were preparing to celebrate there was not the Christ Mass but the Money-God Mass. The tragedy in Managua tonight, and in the whole country, is very much like the painful scene described in the Gospel: Mary homeless and having to give birth to the Son of God surrounded by animals. I also told them that a few hours before the earthquake a group of boys and girls had gathered in the atrium of the cathedral to begin a three-day fast in protest against social injustices: malnutrition, lack of housing, exploitation of laborers, thefts from the people…. And they were asking for a Christmas without political prisoners.

REBECA spoke: “From the moment of his birth, God chose conditions like the poorest person, didn't he? I don't think God wants great banquets or a lot of money, as Ernesto has said, or for business to make profits off the celebration of his birth. He wants us to wait for him maybe like Nicaragua is waiting right now, because he was born as a poor child and he wants us all to be poor, right? Or for us to be all equal, and he doesn't want us to do

what they used to do in Managua, where Christmas was only a celebration to spend money (for the ones who had money), to have a good time, to dance or anything. They weren't celebrating his coming. That's what I believe…"

And another one added: "The Scriptures are perfectly clear, man. The fact is that Christ was born as a poor little child, like the humblest person. The Scriptures keep telling us this and I don't understand why we don't see it."

Another said: "These facts hurt our consciences and bring us closer to him. Because us humans easily get off the track and we need very strong shocks to be able to change."

PEDRO RAFAEL GUTIERREZ, a Managua journalist who has been studying with us for two months, said: "I'm practically a stranger among you (it's exactly two months since I arrived in Cosme Canales' boat), but I already feel a great affection for you all, for Octavio, Tomas Peña, Doña Justa, Laureano, Alejandro, William, Tere, Ernesto, and I'm sorry to have to leave you now to go back to the ruins of Managua to search for my family. You are really poor people, but there I'll find people poorer than you, without water, without electricity, without food, even without a communion like this one. I hope that this tremendous grief in Managua will be a rebirth. Innocents died in Managua like innocents died when Christ was born. But Christ lived, which is what matters. I hope that we can profit there from this terrible Christmas to bring about a *total* change. And I want to say goodbye."

JOSE the carpenter spoke: "The change has to be for everybody. We shouldn't try to dominate each other either. Just now we read that Jesus was born poor, among the animals. He was born there for a reason…"

Old TOMAS PEÑA, who besides being a farmer is a good fisherman: "To teach us not to seek riches, not to have a big house to have a child in, right? Just what's natural."

I said that Pedro was right in speaking of this painful Managua Christmas as a rebirth. At the Last Supper Christ also spoke of his death as a birth. Every woman suffers great pain when she is going to give birth, he said, but afterwards she is filled with joy when the child is born. This is how he explained his death and also all human tragedy. Women understand these things better. And his mother Mary would understand it very well, Mary who had her labor pains in a stable on the first Christmas. Perhaps he

said this especially for her since she would suffer so much during his passion. But he said it for all of us too. Human tragedy has meaning. It is for a birth.

JULIO: “But maybe the suffering in Managua will just help the Christians, just the ones who understand. And not those who don't understand.”

Another young man: “Tragedy is for everybody, understand it or not, and the birth is for everybody. Even though Christians are the only ones maybe who can understand tragedy.”

FELIPE, the son of Tomas Peña, turned to me and said: “I believe, Ernesto, that Jesus Christ has done this on this Christmas because more than anything else he likes equality. In Managua a lot of people were planning a very merry Christmas, even though others were suffering, and if the tragedy had not happened in Managua, if it had been out in the country, they wouldn't be sad. But since it's Managua that has been destroyed, now we're all living through the same thing, we're all feeling the grief that everybody else is.”

And PEDRO RAFAEL GUTIERREZ, the journalist: “What Felipe has said is very beautiful. Christmas last year was a very merry Christmas in Managua. The rich had huge turkeys, very pretty Christmas trees, and a lot of decorations and lights in their houses. But neighborhoods like Acahualinca didn't have a thing. There was more misery there than out in the country. This year again there's nothing in Acahualinca, but the rich don't have anything either. Tragedy made us equal. For the first time in the history of Nicaragua rich and poor shared the tragedy, which used to be shared only by the poor. And this is the most wonderful thing that has happened, because tragedy has brought us all together as equals.”

ALEJANDRO: “We should clear one thing up. Let's not be happy because there was tragedy for everybody. The best thing would be for nobody to suffer. Let everybody have enough to be happy at Christmastime. Just to clear it up a bit.”

I said that the goal is to conquer tragedy, even death. We Christians believe that one day death will be defeated (by life, which is to say, by love). From now on with love we can triumph over illness, ignorance, misery, and even the catastrophes of nature. At the moment we have a social system that cannot solve these problems. The city had a terrible misfortune, with a selfish, individualistic system like capitalism in which each one goes off on his own pursuing his own interests. And there isn't any

unity or cooperation like you find among certain animals like ants and bees. In a society of solidarity and not of selfishness like this one, people can defend themselves perfectly well against natural catastrophes like the eruption of a volcano or an earthquake. Jesus came to earth precisely for this reason. He was born into a humanity divided and dominated by crime in order to unite us and to change the order of things. And that's where we are…

FELIX interrupted me: “I believe that what happened in Managua had to happen because of the sins…”

OLIVIA: “The earthquake didn't happen because of sins. But the consequences of the earthquake did happen because of sins, because sins are selfishness.”

JULIO: “Sufferings aren't God's punishment, because the poor are always the ones who suffer most. If you're rich you pay for a car, a plane, and you get out of the city. You don't have any problem.”

“I think it doesn't even do the President any good to be rich right now,” said another, “because he's a man who has very wrong ideas about his money. And when a part of the presidential palace fell down he thought he was dying and he wasn't.”

PEDRO RAFAEL GUTIERREZ spoke again: “I think that in this earthquake the ones who are suffering most are the rich, and I'm going to tell you why: Acahualinca has never had any water, any electricity, any milk, any rice, any beans. Now this Christmas the rest of them don't have any either. But the poor have been without food and electricity for a long time. All their Christmases have been like this. The radio talks about people going out into the street without shoes or clothes, and how the hell long have the poor people gone without shoes and clothes?”

“They've been like that since the birth of Jesus…”

FELIX spoke again: “I'm going to tell you one thing. Listen to me, Pedro. The rich never suffer. The government puts a five per cent tax on business. And are they the ones who pay it? It's the poor. And tell me, who are the workers in Nicaragua if the poor aren't? Who creates all the business in Nicaragua? Isn't it the people that pay for it? And then this crisis comes. And who do they gouge for it? The ones that pay are us, the *campesino*s, the poor who work in Nicaragua.”

Outside there was a lovely full moon and on both sides of the little church the lake was calm. Now it was just the young people who went on

talking.

“We're not the only poor ones. Managua was full of poor people, not just the rich. Most of the laborers in the country were there. And there are poor people everywhere.”

“He came to share the lot of the poor. And Joseph and Mary were turned away from the inn because they were poor. If they'd been rich they'd have been welcomed in.”

“God wanted his son to be born in a pigsty, in a stable…. He wanted his son to belong to the poor class, right? If God had wanted him to be born to a rich lady, that lady would have had a room reserved at that hotel. Especially arriving in her condition.”

“I see in this the humility of God. Because it was his son, and his mother had him just like any dog. And Jesus came to free the world from these injustices (which still exist). And he came so that we could be united and struggle against these injustices…. Because we go right on being like that, with somebody's foot on our neck. And the rich, how do they look at us? They look down on us. That's why we've got to get together to win. Or even all be a single revolutionary. Like Christ. He was the greatest revolutionary, because being God he identified with the poor and he came down from heaven to become a member of the lower class and he gave his life for us all. The way I see it, we all ought to struggle like that for other people and be like him. Get together and be brave. That way nobody will be without a house, and even if an earthquake knocks his house down he'll get another one. And nobody will have to go on being humiliated by the rich.”

“With today's Gospel, it seems to me that no poor person should feel looked down upon. It seems to me that it's clear that a poor person is more important than a rich one. Christ is with us poor people. I think we're worth more. To God. To the rich we aren't worth a thing, good only to work for them.”

“Well, God is showing us with this Gospel that the rich think of us as dirt. Like we have no value. For them we don't exist. Here we see that's the way they treated his son, with no consideration. Not even a roof over his head or a cot to sleep on.”

“The poor person supports the rich ones because if he didn't work they wouldn't be anything. But the rich take advantage of the poor, and when they have their banquets they go off by themselves. They don't know that everything they have comes through the poor. They think they get things

done through their money, but it's through the poor person's work. And of course when they have their banquets they forget all about you. They think banquets are only for them. They don't know that without us they wouldn't be worth anything."

"Jesus was rejected in Bethlehem because he was poor, and he goes on being rejected in the world for that same reason. Because when you come down to it the poor person is always rejected. In our system, that is."

"But now this Christmas Managua doesn't have any houses, just like Jesus in Bethlehem was born without a house. And there are no Christmas banquets just like there wasn't any banquet in Bethlehem when Jesus was born. Now this Christmas seems to me more Christian, and it can help raise our consciousness. And maybe someday everybody will have a house and everybody will be happy and nobody will be rejected."

At the end they talked about taking up a collection for Managua. Some offered corn, others rice, beans. Felix asked me if I was going to Managua the next day. I told him I would try to go (I had no news of my family either), although I didn't know if there was any transportation to get there.

"When there's no transportation we walk."

6.

The Shepherds of Bethlehem

(Luke 2:8–20)

Near Bethlehem there were some shepherds who were spending the night in the field, watching over their sheep. Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared, and the glory of the Lord shone round them: and they were very frightened. But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for I bring you good news that will be cause for much joy for all."

We were gathered in the little church. The first to speak was old TOMAS PEÑA, with his customary wonderful simplicity: "The way I see it is that those guys who were watching over their sheep heard good news. There they were just like us here, and they heard good news. Like when we heard that you were coming. They told us that a priest was coming and we couldn't believe it at first, because no priest ever used to come here…. Well, it was like this when they were watching over their sheep and they heard good news. They were sad before. They weren't at a party. They were just screwed up."

"And why were they the ones to get the good news?" I asked.

TOMAS PEÑA: "Because they were closer to God. Others were thinking about bad things, and not good things. That's how it seems to me."

PATRICIO: "They were closer to God because they were there at night keeping watch, and since they were keeping watch God wanted to send them good news. It seems to me that that's the way it might have been."

FELIPE: "The angel came to them because they were working men, and I find this is very important for us. Because they were poor little people who were working. They were watching over their sheep which is like taking

care of cattle today. They were workers, laborers, poor people. The angel of God could have gone to the king's palace and said to him: ‘The Savior has been born.’ But the angel didn't go where the king was but where the poor people were, which means that this message is not for the big shots but for the poor little guys, which means the oppressed, which means us.”

I: “It was really the shepherds who were at the bottom of the social scale in Israel…”

ALEJANDRO: “And the good news is that they're going to find somebody just like themselves, a poor guy wrapped in swaddling clothes.”

> *Today was born in the city of David a Savior for you, who is Christ the Lord.*

FELIX: “He's making it clear that it's for them that he's coming. It seems to me that they were like slaves and when they heard that a liberator was coming they were filled with joy. They already knew that a Messiah was coming, and when they hear the angel announce that he's already here they're filled with joy. They know that this birth was going to free them from slavery, because, like the slaves that they were, they were forced to work. A liberator from all slavery. He was coming to liberate all slaves, all poor people, not just poor people of that time but those of today too! Every poor person who lives working for the rich lives like a slave.”

FELIPE: “Every worker is always poor, even if he works in a factory.”

FELIX goes on: “He was coming to liberate the poor. He wasn't coming to liberate the rich. That's why the news had to come to poor people. It was for them most of all. And it's the same now: The news, the word of God always goes to the poor people. Because I believe that the poor people, because of their poverty, always hear the word of God more often than the rich. A lot of rich people go to church on Sunday but they don't listen to the word of God, they go to enjoy themselves…or they don't go.”

SABINO: “It's the same with a lot of poor people here…. They don't come to church…”

FRANCISCO: “Even the angel didn't reach all the poor people…”

FELIPE: “The Gospel says he came to people who were working, not to people who were loafing.”

FELIX: “Well, the Holy Spirit always comes more to poor people nowadays, because the poor people in their slavery have to turn to God

every day. And when you least expect it, maybe working in the field, suddenly you get a good idea: That means the Spirit came to you."

OSCAR: "They were like us, poor and in need of a liberator. Because they took care of the animals, but on the other hand they were alone, abandoned by everybody. That's the way we are, humiliated by the rich too. But if somebody comes to tell us that we shouldn't be always serving those rich people like slaves, comes to talk to us about Revolution, something like that, then we gradually realize that we too can struggle."

JULIO: "It seems to me that we are the shepherds of the rich people because we work for them. We support them with our work, and a liberator has to come to help us too. We are *campesino*s and woodcutters, but it seems to me that we don't need an angel to come to tell us personally. Or maybe he already came…"

FELIPE: "The angel is any idea, any inspiration that you get in the woods when you're there cutting wood, like Felix says, any idea about doing something for other people, for the community. It's the Holy Spirit, because the Spirit is the spirit of love for others, right?"

JULIO: "Well, that's why I just said that maybe that angel already came and we don't need to wait for him to come in the form of a vision, personally, because maybe right now when we're reading this and hearing these words the angel is coming to give us the news."

I: "That's right. At this very moment you are receiving the same news from the angel that the shepherds received."

LAUREANO: "We already got the news. But we have to do the work…"

"We have to spread the news," interrupted his cousin JULIO.

LAUREANO continued: "To find ways to liberate ourselves. Because liberation comes through people."

FELIPE: "Those who are against it, it's always because of selfishness."

OSCAR: "Also because of fear. A lot of us are afraid. Afraid that they'll do us some harm, prison, death…. And a lot of times this fear is from ignorance."

And as a sign, you will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

OSCAR: "He was born in a farmyard. He came for the sake of poor people, the liberator. That's why he had to be born like that. He had to set an

example for us. That nobody should think he's better than others. To feel ourselves all the same, equal. Because everybody was born from the same womb, his mother's."

ANGEL, Felix's son: "If they'd been offered a good house wouldn't Mary and Joseph have accepted it?"

RAFAEL: "They wouldn't have turned it down, I bet."

OSCAR: "Then it would have been better if he hadn't come."

FELIX: "He was coming to let the poor know he was their comrade."

ANGEL: "The only reason they didn't accept a house is because nobody offered them one."

JULIO: "Why didn't anybody offer them one?"

OSCAR: "They were very poor. That's why."

TOMAS PEÑA: "Maybe people thought they were slippery characters, that they were going to steal…"

FELIX: "That's what happens nowadays. If some raggedy people come to the city and ask for a place to stay they don't get any, or if they do it'll be off in a chicken coop, to sleep with the chickens."

TOMAS: "If he had been born in a rich man's house the shepherds wouldn't have been able to get there, because it was a fancy house. Maybe they wouldn't even have let them in."

OSCAR: "The shepherds wouldn't even have wanted to go there because they would have seen he wasn't coming for them but for the rich."

I said: "And the rich don't need liberation. What liberation do the rich need!"

WILLIAM: "The rich need to be liberated from their money."

FELIPE: "When the poor get liberated, they'll get liberated too."

Little ADAN: "The poor will liberate them."

FRANCISCO: "And the poor also have the chance to be great, like the Messiah who was born like the common people."

I said: "The people really have great abilities that only need to be developed. When the people have education, enough food…"

NATALIA: "Like in Cuba, where all the children are healthy. They're all taken care of when they're sick and everything. If you're old they take care of you. They give you everything you need and you're healthy and eager to work. And there the poor can learn a profession. And where can anybody do that here?"

And suddenly next to the angel appeared many other angels from heaven praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men who love."

Old TOMAS PEÑA asked: "Those other angels who had stayed behind, who didn't come with the other angel, was it because God hadn't enlightened them yet, or was it because they had to come farther?"

I said: "Or because the shepherds hadn't seen them. First an angel speaks to them, afterwards they hear others…"

TOMAS: "It's like us here. We're all listening, but we don't manage to understand everything. So then, those who had heard hadn't taken it all in."

DON JULIO CHAVARRIA: "Not until that moment was there peace on earth —when the child was born. And that's probably why there was joy in heaven. That's what the angels are singing, it seems to me."

EDGARD, a young man who had been a Franciscan and who was visiting us, said: "The glory of God can't exist in heaven until there is peace among men, which means justice, brotherhood, equality (peace is all this). The rich often believe that they give glory to God, but they don't give peace and justice, and so they don't give glory to God because the two things go together."

WILLIAM: "When there is peace, love, there is glory to God."

They went quickly and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw him, they told what the angel had said to them about the child, and all those who heard them wondered at what they said.

JULIO: "Before they felt oppressed, and when the Savior came, they felt free and told about their joy."

TOMAS: "And then all the people were happy, I mean the poor people, because the new news reached them all."

But Mary kept all this in her heart, thinking about it.

TOMAS: "She wasn't surprised like the rest of them, because she was lit up by the Holy Spirit and by everything that had happened to her. But even so she thought that maybe others would tell things that weren't so. They would make them bigger and say things they hadn't seen. And she also

thought that they could kill him, or do something else to him, right? Dangerous…They could do all kinds of bad things to him.”

I: “Yes, Mary already knew from the Annunciation that Jesus would be the Messiah…”

TOMAS: “She thought they could hurt him because he was the Messiah. And they did attack him. Because since he was coming to liberate us, all the people, he would face many enemies. He was going to have many struggles.”

JULIO: “And if Mary knew that's why Jesus was coming, and she knew it sooner than the angels, why didn't she tell? Why did she wait for the angels to tell? It seems to me she was afraid they would come to kill him, so she'd rather keep the secret. That's why she didn't tell.”

OSCAR: “The shepherds knew it. The king and the rich people didn't know it. The same thing happens now. Not everybody knows about the coming of this Jesus.”

JULIO: “I think a lot of people know about it, but what happens is that there's a lot of fear. They don't dare approach like the shepherds did because they're afraid. And there are a lot of other people who don't know about it.”

7.

The Visit of the Wise Men

(Matthew 2:1–12)

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King. Then to Jerusalem came wise men from the East saying: "Where is the King of the Jews that has been born? For we saw his star in the East and we have come here to worship him."

We were in the church. I said by way of introduction that these words of Matthew, "in the days of Herod the King," are telling us that Jesus was born under a tyranny. There were three Herods, as we might say in Nicaragua three Somozas: Herod the elder, Herod his son, and a grandson Herod. Herod the elder, the one at the time of Jesus' birth, had ordered two of his sons to be strangled on suspicion of conspiracy, and he also killed one of his wives. At the time of Jesus' birth he killed more than three hundred public servants on other suspicions of conspiracy. So Jesus was born in an atmosphere of repression and terror. It was known that the Messiah was going to be king, and that's why the wise men arrived asking for the king of the Jews, meaning the Messiah. The wise men were often priests and sometimes they became kings, but they were above all philosophers and people devoted to the study of the sciences, especially that of the stars. Perhaps they would be more like what we would call scientists than wise men. And they also taught a religious doctrine, that of Zoroaster. The star they speak of could have been a comet, like the comet Kohoutek now approaching the earth. (We know that at the time of Christ's birth there was a great one, now called Halley's comet.) Or it could have been any other celestial phenomenon, or it might have been only a way of speaking,

peculiar to the Orient, comparing the Messiah with a star. Possibly this whole passage from Matthew is fiction, an imaginary narrative that he chose to insert here. But it could have happened this way."

LAUREANO said: "I think these wise men shit things up when they went to Herod asking about a liberator. It would be like someone going to Somoza now to ask him where's the man who's going to liberate Nicaragua."

Another of the young men: "The way I figure it, these wise men were afraid of Herod and didn't want to do anything without his consent."

TOMAS PEÑA: "They went to ask him for a pass…"

The same young man: "They probably went first to consult Herod because they were afraid of him, and all those people of Jerusalem were filled with fear when they heard talk of a Messiah, just like Nicaraguan people are afraid when they hear talk of liberation. The minute they hear that young people want to liberate those of us who are being exploited, they begin to shake and be afraid. When they hear people say that this government must be overthrown, they shake and are afraid."

ADAN: "It seems to me that when those wise men arrived they knew that the Messiah had been born and they thought Herod knew about it and that the Messiah was going to be a member of his family. If he was a king, it was natural that they should go to look for him in Herod's palace. But in that palace there was nothing but corruption and evil, and the Messiah couldn't be born there. He had to be born among the people, poor, in a stable. They learned a lesson there when they saw that the Messiah had not been born in a palace or in the home of some rich person, and that's why they had to go on looking for him somewhere else. The Gospel says later that when they left there they saw the star again. That means that when they reached Jerusalem the star wasn't guiding them. They'd lost it."

FELIX: "They were confused. And it seems to me that since they were foreigners they didn't know the country very well, and they went to the capital, where the authorities were, to ask about the new leader."

> *When Herod the king heard this he was very troubled, and all the people of Jerusalem also*.

OSCAR: "I figure that when Herod found out that that king had been born he was furious because he didn't want to stop being the ruler. He was as

mad as hell. And he was already figuring out how to get rid of this one like he had got rid of so many already."

PABLO: "He must have felt hatred and envy. Because dictators always think they are gods. They think they're the only ones and they can't let anyone be above them."

GLORIA: "And he was probably afraid, too. He had killed a lot of people not long before, and then some gentlemen arrive asking where's the new king, the liberator."

FELIX: "He surely must have put all his police on the alert. I think that's what the Gospel means here: 'He was very troubled.'"

One of the young people: "And the Gospel says that the other people of Jerusalem were also troubled. That means his followers, the big shots, like the Somoza crowd. Because for them it was very bad news that the liberator was arriving. But for poor people it was great news. And the powerful people knew that the Messiah had to be against them."

Old TOMAS PEÑA: "That king who ruled that republic with a firm hand—he ruled a million people or however many there were then—he didn't allow anyone to say anything he didn't like. You could only think the way the government wanted, and they surely didn't allow any talk about messiahs. And they must have been annoyed when outsiders came talking about that, as if they were talking about a new government."

MANUEL: "The people had been waiting for that Messiah or liberator for some time. And it's interesting to see that even out of the country the news had got around that he had been born, and these wise men found out, it seems to me, from the people. But in Jerusalem the powerful were entirely ignorant of his birth."

> *Then the king called all the chiefs of the priests and those who taught the law to the people, and he asked them where Christ was going to be born.*

FELIPE: "The clergy are summoned by a tyrant who has killed a lot of people. And the clergy answer the call. It seems to me that if they went to his palace it's because they were his supporters, they approved of his murders. Just like today the monsignors who are supporters of the regime that we have. It means that those people were like the people we have today in Nicaragua."

They told him: "In Bethlehem of Judea: for thus it is written by the prophet."

I said that they knew the Bible well and that they knew that the Messiah was to be born in that little town called Bethlehem.

DON JOSE: "They knew he was going to be born in a little town, among the common people. But they were in Jerusalem, visiting with the powerful and the rich in their palaces. Just like today there are a lot of Church leaders who know that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and every year they preach about this at Christmas, that Jesus was born poor in a manger, but the places they go to all the time are rich people's houses and palaces."

Then Herod summoned the wise men in secret and asked them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, "Go and find out about that child and when you find him, let me know, so that I may go and worship him also."

REBECA: "Herod hears he's going to be born in a little town, like you might say here in Solentiname, which isn't much. That's why he asks the wise men to let him know when they've found the child. Because how else is he going to find out about the Messiah if the Messiah is born among the people, a poor woman's little kid. The people around there in those parts, they would know about it, but they'd keep it a secret."

When they saw the star again they were filled with joy. They went into the house; they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they knelt down and worshipped him. Then they opened their boxes and they gave him presents of gold, incense, and myrrh.

TOMAS: "They come and open their presents—some perfumes and a few things of gold. It doesn't seem as if he got big presents. Because those foreigners that could have brought him a big sack of gold, a whole bunch of coins, or maybe bills, they didn't bring these things. What they brought to him were little things…. That's the way we ought to go, poor, humble, the way we are. At least that's what I think."

OLIVIA: "It's on account of these gifts from the wise men that the rich have the custom of giving presents at Christmas. But they give them to each other."

MARCELINO: “The stores are full of Christmas presents in the cities, and they make lots of money. But it's not the festival of the birth of the child Jesus. It's the festival of the birth of the son of King Herod.”

Afterwards, being warned in a dream that they should not return to where Herod was, they returned to their country by another way.

TOMAS: “The wise men go off by another route. He inspired them not to inform on him, because he was already a fugitive. He made them see they shouldn't go back the same way. It was better to go another way. Already defending his body. At least that's what I think.”

FELIPE: “By now they were like fugitives too. They went off by another way like they were fleeing. And I think that if they'd returned to the capital they'd have been killed.”

ALEJANDRO: “Well, the liberator was born in an atmosphere of persecution, and those who come to see him are also persecuted. The people must have kept the secret…”

OLIVIA, his mother: “The truth is that ever since he was at his mother's breast he had the rich against him. When she was pregnant Mary had sung that her son was coming to dethrone the powerful and to heap good things upon the poor and to leave the rich without a single thing. And from his birth they pursued him to kill him, and then he had to flee in his mother's arms and with his papa…”

GLORIA: “Those common people had a hope now. And as soon as they found out he'd been born they felt happy. The neighbors all knew. That star, maybe it was the townspeople talking, and it got to the wise men.”

TOMAS, with his great simplicity: “This comes down pretty much to what I said before, maybe not quite, but more or less: We heard that a priest was coming here. Then we believed it and we said, ‘If a priest is coming to Solentiname it'll be a great thing. We're going to live happier, better, or in some other way.’ It seems that the whole town was glad because the place was going to have a priest. Well that's the way I think it was at that time. They had to be glad because of the birth of this little kid…”

CHAEL: “Those wise gentlemen found something they weren't expecting —that the liberator was a poor little child, and besides, a little child persecuted by the powerful.”

LAUREANO: “The ones who were persecuting him were the rulers. He was a guy that was coming to change everything, coming to make everybody equal, coming to liberate the poor and to take power away from the rulers because they were shitting everything up. And that's why the powerful went after him to kill him.”

8.

The Slaughter of the Innocents

(Matthew 2:12–23)

Shortly before we had Mass this Sunday a National Guard patrol came to inspect our houses. (Martial law had been declared throughout the country, with a suspension of individual liberties.) Some people seemed to be a little afraid, but the children rushed gaily throughout the church and made so much noise that it was hard at times for us to hear clearly the commentaries on this Gospel passage. MYRIAM had read:

> *After the wise men left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in his sleep and said to him: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to the land of Egypt and stay there until I tell you to come back. Because Herod is going to look for the child to kill him."*

Among those present was my brother FERNANDO (a Jesuit priest), and he said: "I think that if Mary, when she was waiting for the birth of the infant, had the idea of a messiah who would be in power, she quickly lost the idea. She realized that she had given birth to a messiah who was subversive from birth. And I also think that for a long time we have been misreading the Gospel, interpreting in a purely spiritual sense, eliminating all its political and social circumstances, which are certainly very dramatic; that is, we have abstracted the Gospel from its reality. How often have I read that Saint Joseph and the Virgin fled to Egypt. But only now, when an army patrol has just come, have I really understood that very real and harsh circumstance that the Gospel presents to us here: repression. We can imagine what this

means: leaving at night, hiding, with great fear, leaving everything behind, and having to reach the border because they are being pursued."

One of the ladies said: "It's very rough, but what happened then has gone on in every age. There was a king like those who exist now in many countries, in our country and in many others, and if that child was coming to liberate from injustice, the ruler had to pursue him and try to kill him so that the people would live forever in slavery. The same thing happens here the minute a good person appears. We've seen how in the north they've killed that union leader Catalino Flores. I heard the news on the Cuban radio; up to then I still thought it wasn't true. Sure, they always persecute people who want to free the rest, and they kill them. That's what happened to Jesus; they tried to eliminate him when he was a child."

Another of the ladies: "Yes, that's just like what goes on nowadays, and it's because anyone that is struggling for the liberation of the oppressed, he himself is a Christ, and then there's a Herod, and what we're seeing is the living story of the life of Jesus. And more Herods will come along, because whenever there's someone struggling for liberation there's someone who wants to kill him, and if they can kill him they will. How happy Somoza would have been if Ernesto and Fernando had died when they were little kids so they wouldn't be teaching all this. It's perfectly clear that the business of Herod and Christ, we have it right here."

One of the boys: "I think that the same thing happened to Catalino Flores as to Christ, exactly. They didn't kill him when he was a child because he, like Jesus, managed to escape. They killed him at an age when he had already fought his fight. He fought, and they killed him, but the same thing happened to him as to Christ, that he is resurrected and is in the hearts of everyone that wants the things that he wanted."

DONALD, who is studying in a small town on the Costa Rican border and has come home for his vacation: "But in the Gospel it's a tiny child that they're persecuting, and here they're not going to persecute a newborn child. From the time he was born, they were looking for Jesus to kill him, and his parents had to save his life."

Another of the boys: "I think the same thing happens here, Donald. Can I say something? You know what country we're in, and how there's so much infant mortality, and so many stunted, undernourished children. I think that's persecuting children. I think the same thing is happening here as happened to Christ when he was persecuted as a kid."

And I said that there are many *campesino* families that have had to leave their homes in many parts of Nicaragua, fleeing from misery and hunger, or because they have been driven off their lands, or because the National Guard is killing the *campesino* leaders, burning farmhouses, raping women, jailing whole families, torturing. And the picture of all those families fleeing, mothers carrying their children in their arms, is the same as the flight to Egypt.

LAUREANO: “Another thing: The revolutionary conscience in these countries is still a child. It's still tiny. And they persecute it so that it won't grow.”

> *When Herod understood that the wise men had tricked him he got very furious and he ordered the slaughter of every child two years or under who lived in and around Bethlehem*.

A girl said: “The same thing happened up north when Catalino appeared: Since they didn't know him well or even which one he was, they killed all the farmers around there.”

Old TOMAS PEÑA: “Herod ordered the kids killed since he wanted to reign forever and didn't want a liberator. Of course, when he heard ‘There is a king’ he said: ‘There's no king but me. I better kill him.’ And then he tried to figure how to kill him, but as Jesus Christ was more powerful than he was, he couldn't kill him.”

Young OSCAR: “That Herod was a coward. It was because he was a coward that he committed all those murders. A lousy coward.”

Young ALEJANDRO: “It's the same thing nowadays: As soon as they see the first signs of anything new, they get scared and begin to murder, as happened with this child. It's because these people are cowards, and it's cowardice that makes them kill defenseless people. Like Herod who didn't kill armed soldiers but poor children.”

A Protestant who has come from the coast opposite: “They persecuted Jesus, but he wasn't in opposition to any government.”

FELIPE: “He came as the king of the Jews. What more opposition do you want?”

Another young man: “Herod, of course, that millionaire, with his power he had everybody crushed. And the same thing happens here and in other places, wherever they're screwing the people. The innocent. Because the

ones they're killing are the innocent, the ones who are dying, like that boy in the mountains up north. In all these cases they're killing the child that they don't want to see grow up. Back then something like that occurred. Herod was the Somoza of that region, and when he heard that that child had been born, he went after all the children. As soon as they glimpse a sprig of liberation anywhere, they do what Herod did."

LAUREANO: "And not only that, because Herod killed them after they were born; now they kill them before they're born with their famous Family Planning; they kill the children before they're born for fear that later there'll be a people that they won't be able to control."

I said that was very true, and that there are clinics set up all through the country where they sterilize women without their consent. This is a campaign that the United States is waging throughout Latin America. They have population experts throughout Latin America, in charge of seeing that the population doesn't increase. President Johnson once said in a speech that bringing up a Latin American cost the United States two hundred dollars, while stopping him from being born cost only five dollars. And as an economist has said: If births decrease, funds for investment will increase.

Another young man: "Herod was less cruel than these people."

WILLIAM: "That government was also set up by the Empire."

I said that in fact Herod had been put in power by the Roman intervention, and Rome allowed him to call himself "king," although he had very little power. I said also that this slaughter of the innocents, although it seems unlikely, was not so in the case of Herod, who slaughtered many families, and even his own children and his favorite wife. An historian of the period says that his anger was boundless. And it is said that he tried to arrange that on the day of his death children would be slaughtered in Jerusalem so that there would be a lot of mourning. The slaughter of children in a village, that could have been like our little town of Belén, in Rivas, or like Colón, or San Miguelito (and where there were probably not many children), it wouldn't be a cruelty very worthy of attention for historians, especially if Herod was involved. But those children under two years of age in that village (there might have been twenty of them) represent all the innocents that have died for the cause of Jesus, that is, for liberation, in the whole world.

In this way was fulfilled what was written by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great lamentation; it is Rachel who weeps for her children, and she will not be comforted for they are dead."

LAUREANO: "I remember what happened in Chile, where they killed thousands of people, just because freedom was being born there; many people were taken up in airplanes and thrown out into the sea. But they can't put freedom down, just as Herod couldn't put Jesus down."

FELIPE: "And as I see it, Ernesto, we are taught here that to be powerful it isn't necessary to have money, because Christ was born very poor (Herod could not distinguish him from the other children of that village) and Christ was very powerful, so powerful that they were afraid, and they tried to kill him, and afterwards they did kill him but after his death he is even more powerful. So we are taught that we, even though we're very poor, must not feel humiliated, unfit, as they say, as though we had no right to live."

ELVIS: "The importance of the birth of Christ is that it was the birth of the Revolution, right? There are many people who are afraid of the word as they were afraid of Christ because he was coming to change the world. From then on the Revolution has been growing. It keeps growing little by little, then, and it keeps growing, and nobody can stop it."

I: "And it has to grow here also, doesn't it?"

PANCHO: "We have to get rid of selfishness and do what Christ said and go on with the Revolution, as you socialists say. I'm not a socialist, I'm not a revolutionary. I like to hear the talk and grasp what I can but really I'm nothing. Although I *would* like to see a change in Nicaragua."

MANUEL: "But if there's going to be a change you have to cooperate with it, you've got to cooperate."

PANCHO: "But how do you do it! I'd like somebody to tell me: 'That's the way it's going to be done.' But you can't! When we rise up they kill us."

ALEJANDRO: "But look, they killed him too."

PANCHO: "Correct, but he was Christ and we're never going to compare ourselves with him."

MANUEL: "But I heard there have been other men, like Che, who also have died for freedom."

PANCHO: "Right. You can die, you, and tomorrow we'll all be dancing and we'll never think that you died for us."

WILLIAM: “Then you think that those deaths are useless?”

PANCHO: “They're useless. Or they're almost useless!”

Young MYRIAM: “I say that when there's someone who will free our country there will be another Christ.”

My brother FERNANDO (to Pancho): “When you say ‘What can I do? Nothing!’ I agree with you. But when you ask another ‘What can *we* do?’ I would say everything. And that day when you ask each other ‘What do we do?’ you'll already know what you are going to do. And the people all united are the same Jesus that you see in this manger scene, against whom Herod couldn't do a thing.” (Fernando pointed to the clay manger scene, made by Mariita, that we had put at the foot of the altar during this Christmas season.)

A young man from Solentiname who now lives elsewhere but who occasionally comes back: “I who have been away notice that the child is being born in this community. And I see the difference between this and the people that live in other places up in the mountains. Of course, up in the mountains it's different. If I sing a song there, they tell me I'm a communist. The way it is up there where we are, if anybody says anything against the government, they say: ‘Go and find out who the communist is so they can come for him.’”

And his brother, who lives in Solentiname: “Ernesto, I'm going to tell you now about my brother. My brother, he knows what a Nativity scene is. We're brothers, after all. I'm going to say a little more. Since he went away, he always has the idea of clearing his conscience, he talks and talks there. Many farmers say, ‘communist!’ and they don't know what a communist is. Now he talks to them a lot, because he's told me, he talks up there to the young people. My brother has told me that some of them agree with him, others don't. He says he's not making much progress. I tell him: Don't be afraid, say what you know, even if it's only a little, I tell him, I know you'll get to them.”

NATALIA, who is a midwife and has been present at the birth of so many children in Solentiname, said: “Well, as I see it, the birth of the child Jesus is also all of us, this unity that we have here. Because in ourselves we are seeing things clearly. But we must all help with this birth of Christ. Like when a baby is being born, and maybe you don't know anything, and they say to you: Come help me. Well, you go, not because you know anything, you don't know anything, right? But because a poor child is being born.

See, I grabbed my petticoat, or if I have on my apron I put it on him! Because he's being born in need.”

I: “That must be difficult, the birth of a child…”

NATALIA: “Oh yes, of course it is. Horrible, isn't it, terrible to see yourself in a fix like that, and maybe you want to know more, know something more, and you see the fix that your friend is in. But you tell her (even though you're dying), ‘Don't worry!’ Even though I was trembling, if my friend was trembling, I said, ‘Don't worry. Don't worry, you'll be okay.’ And you see the problem, and you're covered with cold sweat. This has happened to me. A friend calls me because maybe she thinks I know, and I don't know anything, or nothing more than what her faith puts into me, something.”

OSCAR: “Ernesto, I want to say something. Do you know how I understand birth as I'm listening to Natalia? Very important, the birth of a child and even more to raise a child (I feel this deeply as the father of a family), but that's not the birth that this Gospel is telling us about. Do you know what I understand by a child here? It's the poor people! They are children with respect to the rich. I mean that we, then, since we're poor, we're children, we're always beneath the rich, and we feel maybe: ‘I'd like to be like that one who's taking it easy over there.’ Enjoying what I'd like to enjoy, and I can't, because they don't let me, understand? It seems to me, then, that's what this birth means, a little child who suffers. We ourselves, even though we're adults, are like children: the poor. But I say, the child is not always going to be tiny. I say to my brothers, my comrades: Hell, they're screwing us! We're giving them everything we have! Let's fight! That's what Christ did. He suffered, but he conquered. It's true that he died, as they say, on the cross, but for me he didn't die. And he's talking to us in parables; I understand them, so I'm relying on that. I think what he's telling us is to fight and establish justice. We ourselves are going to give justice to the earth, we the children, to those who are imposing injustice on us. Don't you believe that the child is always going to be crushed and hungry. I mean that the birth that the Scripture tells us about here is not like the birth of one of these kids romping around in the church. No, this child is me, you, everybody. But the rich have always tried to crush us like we crush the snake, by the head, wham!”

ALEJANDRO: “And as I see it that Jesus who was born in a manger, like a child is born here in the mountains, in a farmhouse or in a boat, is the

liberation that's also being born here, in a humble form. And even in those kids who are still so young, who are playing there, and who have been born like this, inside them, even though they don't know it, something is being born: freedom.”

Another young man: “They're learning. The child laughs and makes noise and racket, but inside him freedom is being born.”

After a pause: “Since I was a small boy I've realized that. I don't know anything about politics. I don't know anything about other things either. I'm not a reader or anything. I understand all right but I can't express myself. It bothers me and I want to express myself but I can't. Some people tell me I ought to be happy with this regime because we haven't had wars. You're a young man, they say, and since you were born you've never seen a war and you don't even know what war is. Hell, I say to them, I don't know about those wars, but do you know what war is for me? Hunger, I tell them, because I've suffered hunger, I tell them, together with my mother; one time I even ate salt, I tell them, just salt, I tell them.”

Afterwards we read how Joseph was informed by an angel of the death of Herod and he returned to Israel:

> *But when Joseph learned that Archelaus was governing in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there; and having been warned in dreams, he went to the province of Galilee. When he reached there, he went to live in the town of Nazareth*.

WILLIAM: “They were practically in the underground.”

Another boy: “They were right to stay in hiding, because even if Herod was already dead, there was another dictator there; just as if a Somoza dies and somebody else is in power, you're still always afraid.”

I said that this Herod Archelaus that was left governing Judea was the cruelest of the sons of Herod and was even crueler than his father; his government was inaugurated with a riot by the people and he killed more than three thousand demonstrators who were asking for freedom for political prisoners and for tax cuts. In Galilee Herod Antipas ruled, who was less dreadful, even though he was the one that killed John the Baptist and was governing at the time of the death of Christ.

My brother FERNANDO said: “The old dictator died and the angel tells Joseph that they can come back now, but that doesn't mean that now there

wouldn't be more people that would want to kill the child. In fact his life continued in danger and that's why they went to that insignificant little town of Galilee, and part of his public life he also spent half in hiding, until they finally killed him. And the same thing will happen to anyone who gets involved with liberation: He'll get out of one danger only to fall into another. And this you always have to keep in mind. The angel informed them only that one danger had ended…for the moment."

ALEJANDRO: "And Mary was screwed from the very first, right? It was thirty years of fighting right beside her son, risking herself just like him, from when he was a child until he died. That seems to me a good lesson for every mother. And another lesson was Joseph."

And OLIVIA, Alejandro's mother: "What Alejandro says is quite right, and fathers and mothers ought to think a lot about it. That mother went with her son until his death and willingly. But nowadays many times mothers are the first to be opposed to their sons fighting for freedom. Some of them don't even like the boys and girls to come to the meetings, so they don't get involved. I, when I heard that some young people were taking over at the cathedral, I wanted to be close to them, I wanted to be able to go and see them, help them in some way. And even take the microphone and talk also."

FERNANDO: "I don't understand how you can read the Gospels and get spiritual lessons for your life out of it and not get involved in the Revolution. This Book has a very clear political position for anyone that reads it simply, as you read it. But there are people in Managua who read this Book, and they are friends of Herod; and they don't realize that this Book is their enemy."

> *So that what the prophets said could be fulfilled: that Jesus was going to be called a Nazarene*.

I said that Nazareth was a place so humble that it is not mentioned even once in the Old Testament, and we do not know exactly what prophecies Saint Matthew is referring to. It is believed that he may be punning with a Hebrew name of similar sound that had been given to the Messiah and that means "sprout." One thing seems certain, and that is that the name "Nazarene" that Jesus had was a nickname given him by his enemies to make fun of his humble origin.

GLORIA: “To say ‘from Nazareth’ might be like saying ‘from Nindirí’… or worse, ‘from Solentiname.’”

JOSE, Mariita's husband, said: “His nickname meant that he was a man of the people, and he *was* a man of the people, including even that his parents hadn't been married, were engaged to be married and she was pregnant, as often happens with the poor; with that problem of the poor, then, the Messiah was born, son of an unwed mother.”

WILLIAM (smiling): “And they didn't know who the father was…”

MARIITA: “But he married her because he loved her.”

9.

The Child Jesus in the Temple

(Luke 2:41–52)

When Jesus was twelve years old they all went to Jerusalem as was the custom of that feast. And when they returned, after the feast was ended, the child Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother did not know this.

The young people began to talk. First MANUEL: “He disobeyed. He gave them the slip. And young people should disobey when their parents want to keep them just for themselves, when they want to take them away from the community, from their work with other young people, from their duty, from the struggle.”

Afterwards, LAUREANO, who always talks of Revolution: “Like the guerrilla fighters who go off to fight against the wishes of their parents.”

And one of the old men: “Was it right for a child of twelve to do that? Shouldn't he have asked permission first? They wouldn't have refused it. Imagine how worried they felt as they went around looking for him. Mary scolded him…”

And another one of the young people: “Maybe they wouldn't have given him permission. And that's why he had to do it that way. Jesus here gives us a lesson about independence from the family.”

OLIVIA: “He also did it to help prepare them. He was going to be away from them later. And once Mary and his other relatives came looking for him, and he told them that his family was the community. And then Mary lost him in death, but on the third day, like here in the temple, he was found.”

Three days later they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers of the law, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were astonished at his intelligence and at the answers that he gave.

MANUEL: “He asked questions and gave answers. It was to conscientize them.”

OLIVIA: “He went to the temple to teach the teachers of the law, because these teachers knew the law by heart but they didn't put it into practice.”

ALEJANDRO: “And he chose the temple because it was the center of their religion. He went right to the root of it. Because since religion was corrupt, he wanted to attack the evil at the root, in the temple and with the leaders.”

FELIPE added: “In this Gospel Jesus appears as a rebellious kid. He's still a child and he's already in the temple challenging their religion, criticizing and arguing with those guys, giving them arguments they can't answer.”

MANUEL: “He talked to the doctors because the young always have something new to say to the old. Something that the old don't know. Only young people can say these things, I say.”

And I said then that what they had said had shed a lot of light on this for me. Now I saw it clearly: Jesus was taken to the temple by his parents, in accordance with the religious traditions that they faithfully observed, “as was the custom,” as the Gospel says. There he saw the Jewish religion, legalistic, pharisaical, external. He also saw the money-changers that he was going to drive out later. And then, when his parents were leaving, he went back to the temple to see if he could do something to change the situation.

WILLIAM: “I see in this a lesson for young people. They have to take an interest in correcting their religion when they see that it's evil, ruined by old people. Talk to them, tell them the way Jesus told the teachers of the law: ‘You stupid bastards, that's not the way to do it…. ’ They took him to the temple to fulfill a ritual like all the Jews, but here he committed his first act of rebellion…. First, at that age, he criticizes the temple (questioning the priests). Then he attacks the temple (when he drove out the merchants). Then he declares that there shouldn't even be a temple anymore. The only temple for him is the unity of all people.”

FELIPE: “Conclusion, then: Jesus was a revolutionary from childhood.”

When his parents saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said to him, “My son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been very worried, looking for you.” He said to them, “Why were you looking for me? Don't you know that I have to be about my Father's business?” But they did not understand what he said to them.

ALEJANDRO: “What didn't they understand? That he had to attend to his Father's business they sure understood. What they didn't understand, it seems to me, is that he had to challenge their religion, and that was his Father's business.”

OLIVIA: “I think that Mary was already afraid. When he slipped away she must have thought that he had probably escaped to start the liberation. That's why he says to them: ‘Why did you look for me if you knew that I have to devote myself to these affairs?’ His Father's affairs were to bring liberation. It's clear that Mary probably didn't understand everything and still had a lot to learn. The son would gradually conscientize them.”

Then he returned with them to Nazareth and went on being obedient to them. And his mother kept all this in her heart.

PABLO: “It says he went on being obedient to them, so he hadn't been disobedient. Because to obey God was not to disobey them, even though he had slipped away from them.”

REBECA: “Mary accepted the attitude of Jesus. That's what it means when it says that she kept those things in her heart. And she meditated about it. She probably didn't understand everything at the beginning. She was a humble woman, without education. But she would gradually understand everything in time.”

TOMAS: “And almost surely she was wondering when would be the next time he would get in trouble.”

Meanwhile Jesus went on growing in body and mind, and he had the approval of God and of all the people.

FELIX: “He was developing in love. That was his growing up. He was maturing in his love for people.”

OSCAR: “And he didn't just grow once. He grows and develops in a community every time that love and unity among everyone in the

community develop and grow. And so now here among us Jesus is growing. He is developing and becoming a man.”

10.

John the Baptist in the Desert

(Luke 3:1–20)

At that time God spoke to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness. And he passed through all the places near the River Jordan, telling people that they ought to change their attitudes and be baptized, so that their sins could be forgiven.

TOMAS: “It seems to me that nobody there was baptized, right? He was coming to baptize them, it seems to me, so that they would change their attitude and look for the straight path and not look for the crooked path. The water wouldn't do it. They had to change their attitude.”

OLIVIA: “It's a lesson for us because we're all baptized and yet even now every one of us is full of selfishness. The one who has most and is rich doesn't want to share his riches with the rest. He doesn't want to give—not even to pay what's fair, much less to give. So the baptism we have is just a baptism of water, not a change of attitude. The rich are the first to get baptized, as soon as they're born. They do this because they have money and there's a big party with delicious food and they drink toasts.”

FELIX: “The rich child is baptized as soon as he's born, but the baby has no understanding or knowledge. He doesn't know anything, and the baby who's not baptized is just the same, you see? God sent John the Baptist to baptize those Christians because they were people of understanding and John the Baptist was telling them what they had to do. And they had to understand. But not now. A child is baptized, and he's just the same. And his father has little interest in showing him the road to God. And if nobody shows him the way he stays the same, he never knows anything. But his

father ought to show him the road to God, and that's what God told John to show them…"

Someone said: "And John was the first one to change his attitude."

Another: "It seems to me that he didn't change his attitude. He was close to God ever since he was born."

TERE (holding her son Juan in her arms): "It's interesting to see that he, a *campesino*, was sent to baptize and conscientize, and not a priest."

This happened just as the prophet Isaiah had written: "The voice is heard of someone crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make a straight path for him.'"

FELIPE: "He was a man who lived in the desert, wasn't he?"

I told him that "desert" meant simply a remote place, without people, like in Nicaragua we say, "the mountains" or "the woods" (like this Solentiname place is called "the woods"). And through some manuscripts recently found in some caves it is now known that in those regions there were some communities, a kind of monastery, of a very religious sect called the Essenes. And surely John the Baptist lived with them (and Jesus' going into the desert meant that he was probably spending some time in these communities). But the Essenes lived in isolation and wanted no contact with the world, whereas John went to the "desert" not to be isolated but to send a message from there to the cities.

Every gulley shall be filled, every hill and hillock shall be leveled.

OLIVIA: "It seems to me that happens only in a socialist society, where everybody lives equal. Capitalism is all gone and everybody lives like everybody else."

WILLIAM: "Yes, it means to level society. He was preaching equality. The prophet Isaiah had used those images to say that a man was going to come preaching equality to prepare for the arrival of the Messiah, and that man was John. All the more reason why we should preach it, since the Messiah has come and we're trying to live Christianity. 'Every gulley shall be filled' means there'll be no misery and 'every hill and hillock shall be leveled' means that there won't be great wealth either."

And everyone will see the salvation that God gives.

MARIITA: “Everyone will see the liberation that God gives on the day that we get that equality. I believe those words of John are still real for us.”

LAUREANO: “I believe we're preaching it here in the woods too, in the ‘desert,’ as John preached it.”

> *When the people came to be baptized, John said to them: “O race of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the terrible punishment that is coming? Behave in such a way that it will be seen that you have changed your attitudes.”*

I said that here the Gospel used the Greek word *metanoia*, which means “change of mind.” This word used to be translated as “conversion” or “repentance,” but now these words have a purely religious meaning and this new translation, “change of attitude,” is better.

FELIPE: “That's what's most fundamental, Ernesto. I think a person has to change his attitude so that it's noticed in his conduct. That's why he told them to behave in such a way that people would see that they had changed their attitude.”

WILLIAM: “Because conversion can't be only inward. It does no good to be converted inside if we don't change society. They went there to ask for baptism so that their sins would be forgiven. John's message is change society so that it will be clear that you are converted. But all they wanted was the ritual.”

FELIX: “They were coming to be baptized but they kept on being selfish. That's why he calls them a race of vipers. They were going there because all the people were going.”

SABINO: “They were going there the way people now go to that famous medicine man, Nando. People come to him from all over Nicaragua, and he gives them water in a little bottle with some shells…. In the same way those people went to ask for water.”

> *And don't go saying among yourselves: “We are descendants of Abraham”: for I tell you that God can make even these stones descendants of Abraham. The axe is now ready to cut the trees, and every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and burned in the fire.*

OLIVIA: “He meant that they shouldn't feel like saints just because they were descendants of a saint like Abraham. They shouldn't believe that just because of that they were a saved people, because they were very far from justice.”

ADAN: “The same thing happens today with people who think they're within the Church because they go to Mass and receive communion, they take the child to be baptized. But they don't change their attitude. Those people are a race of vipers too.”

PABLO: “Ninety-five percent of Nicaraguans say that they are Christians, but Christianity of that kind even stones could have it.”

GLORIA: “And the tree that doesn't give good fruit is the person who doesn't do anything good for other people. The fruit is action, action to help other people, I mean.”

> *Then the people asked him: “What shall we do then?” He answered them: “The man that has two shirts must give one to the man that has no shirt; and the man that has food must share it with the man that has no food.”*

LAUREANO: “If he said that to them, those guys must have been rich. Because if they'd been poor there was no reason to tell them to give to others.”

FELIPE: “I think he was saying that to the poor, too, creating that conscience in them, not to let their poor comrade starve to death. What I do believe is that this basic doctrine is the doctrine of socialism. John is telling us that this is the society that we have to create. That nobody ought to have one shirt more than his comrade…. We're going to be all equal. That's what we have to seek: socialism, because that way we'd all be living a just life, like God wants.”

MANOLO: “If somebody who has two shirts has to give one away, there's even more reason for somebody who has several houses or estates or a million *pesos*…”

WILLIAM: “I don't think this should be understood so literally—that if I have two shirts I have to give one away…. That's all right, but we're not going to stop there, just looking for somebody who doesn't have a shirt. What this means, it seems to me, is that we have to change the system

where some people have lots of extra shirts and others don't have any. This is leveling the roads, as I said before."

I said that this applies mainly to the rich, as Laureano said, who do not only have many shirts but also houses, lands, factories, mines, railroads. But it can also be applied to the poor, as Felipe says, for example when one has to share his lunch with a friend…

ALEJANDRO: "It's easy to share your meal with a friend. It's harder to share with people you don't know, with the rest of society…"

FELIX: "I think this applies more to the *campesino* than to the rich, because the rich help one another, as long as they all have money. A rich person comes across another rich person and sees that he's naked and runs to give him a shirt and he doesn't have to be asked. Because it's among themselves, the one who has money helps out those who have money. But with us poor people it's different. If one of us has some little thing that God didn't give somebody else, he doesn't share it. And that's why that comparison of the two shirts is for us poor *campesino*s. And I think that us poor people are more selfish than the rich. We said that the reading of the Gospel is aimed more at the rich than at the poor, but it's not true. It's aimed almost more at us. The selfishness of the rich is that they don't look twice at the poor person because he doesn't have any money…"

OLIVIA interrupts: "And how could you be any more selfish than that!"

FELIX: "Well, yes. But then if I'm poor I should also seek out my poor comrade. I meant that us poor are often more selfish than the rich. Among themselves they're good about money. Their selfishness is toward the poor."

WILLIAM: "But they murder each other. In business they all try to ruin the other guy."

FELIX: "The truth is that the nice thing would be if we were all equal. But John's word was not accepted in olden times and it's not accepted among us either."

JULIO MAIRENA: "What John says can apply to us, too, because we can all make a contribution to the struggle to take away from the guy that has a lot and so level ourselves off."

NATALIA: "There are times when we don't trust each other. If I don't have something—a dress, a meal—maybe I'll be embarrassed to tell anyone. But if you have trust then anybody can help you. Because if they're on close terms with me and they say to me, 'Look, Doña Natalia,…' I tell them, 'Go ahead and take it…. " But if they don't have that trust then there's no way I

can know they need a little salt, a little sugar. But if they come to me and I have a little, I share it."

FELIX: "Lack of trust is because we don't have love. If I see a fellow full of love, I trust him enough to ask him a favor, to say to him, 'Look brother, I need this.'"

An elegant lady was with us who had come from the city, and she said: "Has it occurred to you that maybe some people have more than others because they've worked harder, and they've earned it through their own efforts? You know there are people that don't work and still want you to give them things."

JULIO MAIRENA: "We work all day long and we kill ourselves working with our machetes, and the rich are the ones who don't work."

TOMAS: "You have to be careful, because if I have two shirts and I see that the other guy is a bum and won't work, well I'm not going to give him one of my shirts. But in this community we all work. Because if I don't want to work, because I'm drinking a lot, the other guy notices it and he doesn't give me anything and nobody else does either. Once in a while we've had a loafer, but they go away. It used to happen more. It's been getting better recently."

FELIX: "If somebody didn't work here he'd have starved to death by now. Even if you work hard you still have a lot of troubles. How about if you didn't work…"

Some tax collectors also came to be baptized, and they asked John: "Master, what must we do?" And John said to them: "Don't collect more than the law says."

TERE: "Could that law be just? Why does he tell them to obey the law and not to disobey it?"

I: "He's only telling them not to steal. It's not that he approves of the law. As long as the law existed…"

LAUREANO: "These tax collectors weren't revolutionaries and that's why he said that. If they had been revolutionaries he would have told them to disobey the law. That's why they killed him, because he was against the authorities."

Some soldiers also asked him: “And we, what must we do?” And he answered them: “Don't take anything from anyone, either by threats or by accusing him of what he has not done, and be content with your pay.”

One said: “Good advice for the police. In those days there were already informers, right? Security agents. Secret police, like that Mario who used to come here and his name wasn't Mario.”

Another: “It would be like if the captain from San Carlos came to this meeting that we're having here in the church and asked us what he has to do…”

I said: “Even in the army, in the police, there might be some who want to be converted, to change their attitude, like these who came to John, and this is encouraging.”

I indeed baptize you with water, but one will come who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

OCTAVIO: “The Holy Spirit is wisdom.”
JULIO: “It's love for others.”
GLORIA: “And the fire is love too.”
EDUARDO: “Because it gives light and warmth.”
TERE: “And also because it purifies.”

And he now has his fan in his hand to clean the wheat and separate it from the chaff. He will gather the wheat in his granary, but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out.

FRANCISCO: “It seems to me that the chaff is the selfish person, empty of love for others, and wheat is the person who devotes himself to others. Wheat nourishes and that's why it's kept. Chaff is useless, no good for food, and it has to be thrown out.”

ALEJANDRO: “A separation of the ones who are good for something from the ones who aren't. You don't keep what doesn't do any good. Humanity has to be divided into the good and the evil, the ones who love and the ones who don't.”

TERE: “It's up to each one of us to be wheat or chaff. If somebody is useless it's because he's chosen to be like that.”

And we finally saw that John the Baptist was jailed, because:

> *Besides, he reproved Herod the governor for taking as his wife Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, and also for the other bad things he had done.*

MANOLO: “He reproved him not only for adultery but also for all his tyrannies and his crimes. That's what it means here by ‘for the other bad things he had done.’ He couldn't preach about a change of attitude without touching the person of Herod.”

FELIPE: “And when the priest and bishops keep prudent silence in the face of the crimes that happen in this country, because they say that it's not proper for them to get involved in politics, they simply aren't following this example from the Gospel.”

The elegant lady: “And don't you think that John would have been of more use to humanity if they hadn't put him in jail and killed him?”

TERE: “If he had kept silent he wouldn't have done any good. Martyrs may have been very useful during their lives, but they've been more useful to humanity as martyrs.”

FELIPE: “He gave his message even better with his death than with his life.”

11.

The Baptism of Jesus

(Luke 3:21–23)

We were in the meeting hut, facing a very blue and very calm lake. We had rice and beans and fish for lunch. Tomas Peña had brought the fish, and Doña Tomasa had steamed them wrapped in leaves.

We read a short passage from Saint Luke (three verses) and we commented on it:

> *Before this, when Saint John was baptizing all the people, Jesus was also baptized.*

I said, to start with, that "baptism" was a Greek word that meant "bath." It was a purification ritual that many peoples on earth had practiced. And I asked why it was that Jesus was baptized.

One of the women said: "To give us an example. He didn't need baptism but we did, and he did it so we would do it when we saw that even he did it."

Somebody else said: "And he could also have done it out of humility. He was with his people, with his group, and he wasn't going to say: 'I don't need this, you do it, I don't have any sin.' The others, the Pharisees, might say that, the ones who didn't follow John. Not Jesus, he goes along with the others."

And TOMAS PEÑA: "He goes along with the rest of the people. Lots of people were going. He was around there, and went along with the crowd just like one more guy."

ALEJANDRO: “You could also say out of solidarity. So he wouldn't be separated from the group.”

And another: “There are some people here who don't come to church because they think they don't need these things. And so they separate from us, from the community. Not Christ, he agrees to do this even though he didn't need to, so that he wouldn't be separated from the community.”

> *And while he was praying, the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove in bodily form upon him, and a voice from heaven was heard saying: “You are my beloved son; I am well pleased with you.”*

“It wasn't that a dove descended, because it doesn't say that a dove descended but ‘*like* a dove.’ A dove is a soft and loving little animal. And the Holy Spirit is loving. It was the love of God that descended upon him.”

“In this way the Father wanted to make it clear that he was pleased that Jesus had been baptized. He also wanted to show the meaning of baptism, which is to receive the Holy Spirit.”

“God acknowledges him as his Son, and in the same way he acknowledges us too when we're baptized, when we change our attitude, not when we're baptized just out of habit, as is done throughout the country.”

“And this baptism becomes a true one when you become an adult, when you can choose a change of attitude.”

I said: “It seems that this baptism of Jesus was the beginning of consciousness of his mission as Messiah, and of being possessed by the Spirit of God or the Spirit of liberation. In the Old Testament it had been prophesied that that spirit would descend upon the Messiah, and that's what Luke said came down upon Jesus in the form of a dove. Once when the Jewish leaders asked Jesus who had given him authority, he told them he wouldn't answer them if first they didn't tell him with whose authority John had baptized. In saying this he was telling them that he had received his authority or mission as Messiah in that baptism of John. At other times Jesus also spoke of his death as a baptism or ‘bath’ that he was going to have. He means that his true baptism would be that of his death, his blood bath, and this is what he accepted when he accepted his calling as the Messiah.”

Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his work.

I observed that traditionally it has been said that Jesus died at the age of thirty-three, but the Gospels don't give his exact age. They say only that when he began his public life he was about thirty, that is, a young man, and he could have been between twenty and thirty. He was what we would call a boy.”

LAUREANO said, smiling: “I think he was about my age.”

12.

The Temptations in the Wilderness

(Luke 4:1–13)

We read how Jesus was taken to the wilderness by the Holy Spirit and there spent forty days fasting, and I said that this simply meant that Jesus probably had a period of retreat in one of those Essene communities, reflecting about his mission through prayer and fasting.

> *And afterward he felt hunger. Then the devil said to him: "If you really are the Son of God, command this stone to turn into bread." Jesus answered him: "The Scripture says, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but also by every word that God speaks.'"*

FRANCISCO: "The devil wanted him to perform a senseless, useless miracle that wouldn't do anybody any good."

OLIVIA: "Or that would do good only for Jesus himself. Later he would perform the miracle of giving bread to a whole crowd, but that was different. Here we were dealing with a selfish miracle."

GUSTAVO: "And I see that more than anything else the temptation consisted in reducing his messianism to a purely material level—a developmentalist messianism. Of course, bread is important, but we can't stop there. Revolution doesn't mean just giving food and clothing and comforts to people. It goes beyond that. And this was a temptation that Jesus had as the Messiah, and he rejected it."

TOMAS: "Bread is food. Animals live only on food. People live on another food too: the bread of love, or the words of these meetings that we're having here, I mean the Eucharist."

MANUEL: “Christ says that food isn't enough for human life. Just like animals can't live without food, people can't be truly human without the word of God. Without it a person isn't human like other people. He's an animal, a wolf…”

ELVIS: “To teach us that, that we need the word of God for life, he had gone into the wilderness to fast.”

And MARCELINO: “The word of God gives us bread too. Because in a community some might have bread and others might not. And if there's love we share it and we all eat. If there isn't any love, even though there's a lot of food people will be hungry because a few people will hoard the food.”

OSCAR: “The word that God speaks is love, because that's the message God has given us and Christ brought to earth.”

We went on to the second temptation. The devil takes Jesus to a very high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the earth. This is something that he must have seen in his imagination, I said.

> *And the devil said to him: “I will give you all this power and the greatness of these kingdoms. For I have received all this and I give it to anybody I choose. If you will kneel down and worship me, it will all be yours.”*

LAUREANO: “He's like a politician, that devil. Because that's what political campaigns are like. A man comes into a town and makes all kinds of promises so people will vote for him. And people do vote for him and afterwards he doesn't give them shit.”

Another says: “The devil wanted Jesus to adore him so he could be God.”

And another: “He was offering him an imperialist messianism.”

“Then imperialism would be all right if it was the imperialism of Jesus?” asked JULIO.

FELIPE: “No, because if Jesus had fallen into temptation his imperialism would have been just like the others.”

TOMAS: “Just like theirs, because they're under the power of the devil.”

TOÑO: “There's one thing here: The devil is making him a false proposal. He tells Jesus that he's going to give him all the power and the riches of the world, and Jesus, by refusing, is stating that the true master is himself, that

is, all of humanity. And he doesn't have to adore the devil to get him to give Jesus what is rightly his. And that's our situation, too."

I said: "Why do you suppose the devil says that he has received all this?"

WILLIAM: "He grabbed it all. It's a dictatorship. He has the power, but a power that's not legitimate. It's stolen. Imperialism and capitalism and all oppression belong to him. It's up to us to take from the devil what he has grabbed for himself—the riches of the earth. This temptation of Jesus is also a picture of what's happening now: Those in power offer things to the people so that they'll serve them…"

FRANCISCO: "And from what we see in this passage, all governments are of the devil. Christ couldn't set up a government like that. He came to make a Revolution against all these powers. And there will have to come a day when there isn't any government. Then the Revolution will be a complete success."

And FELIPE said: "The devil declares that he is the owner of the kingdoms of the earth. This must be because when he was condemned the devil fell into the depths of the earth, into the abyss. And so he believes he's the owner of the earth. It's not true, but he thinks he owns it. And he wants it all for himself, like a dictator, like an exploiter. And everybody who wants to take over the earth is like the devil. But they don't own the earth, because the only way to own the earth, it seems to me, is in little lots—and little lots all equal."

ALEJANDRO: "When the devil showed Christ in the spirit all the countries he must have been showing him the cities and the governments. Not the lakes, the mountains, the volcanoes, because they aren't evil, they don't belong to the devil."

MARCELINO: "Power. All power is evil and it comes from the devil."

TOMAS: "The devil offers him all this so that he'll adore him, I mean so that he'll become haughty and selfish, so that he'll go over to his side."

I said: "It's true, the devil is the master of pride, of haughtiness, of the power of people over people. This is his nature, and this is what he gives to his people. That's what he offers to Jesus and Jesus rejects it."

Someone else comments: "Riches don't belong to the devil. It's the selfishness of the rich—that belongs to him."

Afterwards the devil took him to the city of Jerusalem and he took him up to the highest point of the temple and he said to him: "If you

are truly the Son of God, cast yourself down from here; because in the Scripture it says: 'God will order his angels to take care of you…'"

TOMAS: "The devil told him to fly off the roof of the temple because he didn't have faith that he was the Son of God. He wanted to know if he was or wasn't. That's why he said that to him."

OSCAR MAIRENA: "The fact is that the devil was testing him out: If you really are, throw yourself down."

Another said: "He's suspicious."

And another: "He's confident. What's happening is that he wants to control the Son of God, to have more power than him, and so he gives him orders to see if he obeys. And so we see the great power that he has in the world…"

And the journalist PEDRO RAFAEL GUTIERREZ, who once had a top position on a government newspaper and who now lives with us: "I see a picture here too: The devil took Jesus up, just as he seizes many of us and lifts us into certain positions. It says: 'He seized him and he took him up.' So to some he gives riches, he gives power, he gives greatness. And once these people are powerful then comes the temptation to screw the weak, to oppress them. And he said: 'No, don't tempt me!' As I see it, there is a temptation of the devil, which is to raise people up, to lift us to the heights and then let us fall."

JULIO MAIRENA: "And it's a useless miracle that the devil proposes: to throw himself down and have angels save him. What for? That wouldn't do anyone any good. That was a show-off temptation."

WILLIAM: "As I see it, this is a messianic temptation too. Throwing himself down from the temple without anything happening to him would be spectacular. Imagine if it was on a feast day and all the people were gathered there. And he presented himself as the Messiah dazzling the masses with his miracle. And Jesus refused to be this kind of a Messiah. Later he would go to Jerusalem during the feast, but in a different way. He rejected the temptation: He told the devil to go to hell. But the Gospel says the devil 'went away for sometime…. ' Afterwards the bastard came back."

"Yes," I said, "in fact these three temptations are a single temptation: that Jesus present himself as the commanding and triumphant Messiah that the Jews were waiting for. And this would be a real temptation for him. And

he rejected it, knowing that liberation for him had to come through suffering and death. When the Jews asked him for a great spectacular sign, he told them that the only sign he would give them was that of Jonah (his death and resurrection). And this temptation not to accept his passion and death, to be another kind of Messiah, he would have it again in Gethsemane."

FELIPE PEÑA: "I see that the devil tempts him by saying 'because the Scriptures say.' It's just like a lot of Catholics and Protestants use the Bible to defend their interests. They say: 'The Scriptures say such and such a thing…' And it's all to exploit us."

And another: "It's like when they say to the poor: 'You've got to respect the property of the rich because it comes to them from God.'"

And still another: "And there's another temptation too: not doing anything, thinking all you have to do is pray, like a lot of Catholics believe; or read the Bible and be very religious, like a lot of Protestants believe."

Jesus returned to Galilee filled with the Holy Spirit, and there was talk about him in all the region around.

ALEJANDRO: "He went to the wilderness guided by the Holy Spirit, and there he was filled more with the Holy Spirit—with this retreat that he had with God, and with the temptations that he overcame. He came back with more love, that's what 'filled with the Holy Spirit' means. He was convinced that he had to be humble and poor to be the liberator of the poor. The devil had tried to make him dizzy with greatness…"

TOMAS: "He received more of the Holy Spirit so that he could suffer and bear it, I mean because of what he was going to suffer at the time of his death."

And I said it was interesting to see that when he was filled with the Holy Spirit, he set out on no other journey, began no other project. Instead he returned to his home, to the humble people where he had been brought up.

13.

Jesus in Nazareth

(Luke 4:16–30)

We were in the little church, and we read the Gospel passage where Jesus goes to the temple in Nazareth and reads a prophecy of Isaiah:

> *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has chosen me to give the good news to the poor; he has sent me to heal the afflicted in heart, to announce freedom to the prisoners and give sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed, to announce the year of grace of the Lord*.

Somebody began by saying that here we see how Jesus wasn't against the Scriptures but against the Pharisees who falsified them in the temples and used them to defend their interests, even though the message of these Scriptures was liberation.

I said that *evangelio* [Gospel] is a Greek word that means “good news,” and the translation that we read here, “to give the good news to the poor,” is better than the one that has been traditionally given, “to evangelize the poor.” The expression “good news” in antiquity had the sense of joyful announcement, of a message of joy or victory. “Good news,” an *evangelio*, was announced when a prince was born, when a battle was won, when the emperor was going to visit a city. When the messenger or evangelist arrived with some “good news” there was great rejoicing. Emperors often sent false “good news” so that great feasts would be held in their honor at the people's expense. In reality the “good news” was always a false joy, and for the people it meant the announcement of a new oppression. When Herod came

to power the cities of Galilee would receive one of these “good news” or *evangelios*. In the time of Christ the word was a political term associated above all with the cult of the emperor, who was considered a god and a savior. Just by using this word, Christ was indicating that his announcement was the announcement of a new kingdom.

And others comment:

“And his good news is for the poor because this new kingdom is the triumph of the poor and the humble.”

“And this is truly good news, not like the others, which were false.”

“And it's a joyful announcement for the whole people, one that deserves to be celebrated.”

“And it's news that we can believe in or not.”

One of the women says: “What he read in the book of that prophet is prophecy of liberation. And it's a teaching that a lot of Christians haven't learned yet, because we can be in a church singing day and night tra-la-la-la, and it doesn't matter to us that there are so many prisoners and that we're surrounded by injustice, with so many afflicted hearts, so many people without education who are like blind people, so much unfairness in the country, so many women whose eyes are filled with tears every day. And, if they take somebody else prisoner, what do we lose? ‘Maybe he did something,’ they say, and that's the end of the story.”

FELIPE adds: “Prisoners, in every sense. Yes, because it's not just the ones who are in jail. It can also be a servant, a prisoner of a rich person, serving him. Also, the ones who are prisoners in their mentality, without any freedom to think. Their minds have been so conditioned that the only thing they know how to do is to serve.”

And one who has come from the opposite coast: “And to put up with whatever they do to them. Because that's how it is; if we're serving some rich person we're putting up with whatever they do to us. They don't even let you go out, because if you go out to take a rest you lose your job. ‘We're going to have to let you go,’ they tell you. And so you don't lose your job, there you are, putting up with things until Sunday.”

And another: “And if we talk about this they say it's communism. That's what the radio says hour after hour: It's communism. What they mean is that they like keeping us in slavery.”

I explained that the “year of grace” that Isaiah speaks of and that was also called the “holy year” was a year of general emancipation of people

and goods, which Yahweh had ordered to take place in Israel every seven years. Bought slaves should then be freed, all debts should be abolished, and lands that had been sold should be returned to their original owners. The aim of this measure was to guarantee equality and freedom, to prevent the monopolizing of the lands. The law later decreed that the year of grace should be every fifty years (the jubilee), and it was really a law that was not carried out. The prophecy of Isaiah was that the Messiah was going to announce a Lord's year of grace that would be definitive.

WILLIAM: “And the holy or jubilee year now means that people go to Rome to pray in the churches and receive a papal blessing. But the holy year should be agrarian reform and the socialization of all means of production.”

Another: “A holy year is what's been done in Cuba…”

> *Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant of the synagogue, and sat down.* As *all eyes were fixed on him, he began to speak and he said: “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your presence.”*

PEDRO RAFAEL GUTIERREZ: “Of course. Just by announcing liberation he was already fulfilling this prophecy. And just by saying ‘today this prophecy is fulfilled’ he was announcing liberation.”

WILLIAM: “The Scripture said that he was going to say those things. He just had to read the Scriptures for them to be fulfilled. The good news was proclaimed to the poor.”

PEDRO RAFAEL: “And so he makes it clear, with deeds more than with words, that he is the Messiah, the announced liberation. This was his first political manifesto.”

OLIVIA: “And from his own lips we heard that those words are for him. And this is how they were fulfilled. Not only those words that he read there but all the other words of Scripture. That's why they're so interesting for us.”

NATALIA: “And now it's up to us to follow those words. I'm sure not everyone believed.”

And TERESITA: “It's like an invitation that he gave, to liberty.”

WILLIAM: “He's saying that he's the one. It's a message of pure liberation: the poor, the afflicted, the blind, the imprisoned…”

LAUREANO: “The truth is that all those people—blind, imprisoned, afflicted—they are the poor.”

PEDRO RAFAEL: “And you have to see, as a contrast, the negative part too. He didn't come to give any news to the rich but to talk to the poor. He didn't come to give health to those who are happy but to those who have problems, to the afflicted. He didn't come to be the ally of those who put people in jail but to free the prisoners. And he didn't come to blindfold people's eyes but to make them see. And he didn't come to oppress but to put an end to oppression and to proclaim total liberation. Let nobody falsify these words, as it often happens. And he said it in church!”

COSME: “We see clearly, as Marcelino said the other day, that the world is very different from the way Christ wants it.”

And I: “An example of how his words have been betrayed is that instead of saying that he came to give joyful news to the poor, it's been translated that he came to ‘evangelize the poor.’”

And they were amazed at his beautiful words and they said: “Is this not the son of Joseph?”

FELIPE laughed and said: “It's as if they were seeing somebody who's the son of Octavio or of somebody around here, a carpenter, a laborer…”

“What he says is true,” added old TOMAS, who can't read. And he continued: “They can say the same thing about these poor people: ‘Isn't that so-and-so?’”

Somebody else cited the case of a neighbor who doesn't want to come to our meetings because he says what can he learn hearing comments on the Gospels from *campesino*s as ignorant as he is and he said: “If only the people who talked were educated! But all that you're going to hear is a Marcelino, an Alejandro, a Laureano…”

And I said: “That's exactly what they said about Jesus. The good news is for the poor, and the only ones who can understand it and comment on it are the poor people, not the great theologians. And it's the poor who are called to announce the news, as Jesus announced it. You would have to make our friend see that liberation can come only from the poor. And another time Jesus gave thanks to the Father because he had hidden this from the learned and he had revealed it only to the poor and the humble.”

He said to them, "Surely you will quote to me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself.'"

REBECA: "Because he was poor. Let him liberate himself before he liberates others. They don't understand that he has to be poor to liberate the poor, and he can't do it if he's rich."

JULIO: "They could say the same to us in Solentiname…"

And he added: "In truth I say to you that no prophet is welcomed in his own country."

TOMAS: "We're sure that's how it is…"

PEDRO: "It proves what he told them because right there they took him out and tried to kill him."

MARCELINO: "Jesus is present again in the temple announcing the good news, and he does it through the mouth of this poor community. And the Scripture that's just been read has been fulfilled right here."

14.

The Man Who Had an Evil Spirit

(Luke 4:31–37)

Then Jesus went to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and there he began to teach people on the day of rest. They were amazed at how he taught them, for he spoke with words of authority.

“We see,” I said, “that Jesus has had to go away from his own town because nobody is a prophet in his own country. He goes to another town, Capernaum, and there he enters another temple.”

And FELIX said: “They were surprised to see that he was a poor man like them, and that he went around maybe in dirty clothes, like them, and his teachings were not the kind that would come from a man with dirty clothes. Last Sunday we heard them say in the other temple: ‘He is the son of a carpenter, a workman; the son of a laborer; we know his father and he's a workman.’ And here too they're surprised that he speaks with authority. A laborer talking with authority.”

And the patriarchal TOMAS PEÑA with his steady voice: “It seems that Jesus was beginning to sprinkle his Gospel around. And it seems that he makes them see from the start that he has more authority and more power. A man like all the others but with an authority that the others don't have. He was a poor man speaking with authority. It's not only the rich that can speak with authority. Here's a poor man who speaks with more authority than the rich and he speaks against the rich. A poor man with more authority than all of them. The people must have been surprised. They wondered at the way he taught them.”

In the temple was a man who had a demon or an evil spirit, who cried: "Leave us alone; why do you meddle with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Do you come to destroy us? I know you, and I know that you are God's Saint."

OSCAR: "It must be that he wanted to have more authority than Jesus, and that's why he got so mad at him. Since Jesus was putting him aside and getting rid of him, so that he wouldn't be a nuisance, he got angry. 'Don't meddle here,' he said, 'go away.'"

ADANCITO: "I'd like to ask one thing. What kind of people nowadays say: 'Let Jesus go away'? And who think that the Church is giving them false propaganda? Who don't want the message of the Gospels to be preached so the poor won't understand that Jesus came to bring good news to the poor, to the laborers, to the oppressed, to the exploited?"

And FELIPE PEÑA, the son of Tomas: "Why, the opponents, the exploiters. If God speaks through the poor now, it's probably the exploiters who will say: We don't want these words of God."

I said that certainly those who commit injustices have to say: "Don't let Jesus come to meddle here." And this Gospel that we preach here in Solentiname must get them very mad. I also said that it was interesting that the demon should call Jesus "God's Saint," which is the same as saying "Messiah." He knew very well who he was, and that's why he wanted him to go away.

And JULIO, Oscar's brother: "Like somebody who reads the Bible a lot and knows God's message very well, but out of selfishness doesn't accept the message. Because it's harmful to him. The demon realizes that Jesus is the Messiah and that he was coming to liberate people, and that's why he didn't want him to meddle with them. He doesn't attack Jesus because he's evil. He attacks him for being God's Saint, and he didn't want to have anything to do with that."

Another said: "He was sincere."

And one of the ladies added: "There are rich people who know that the Gospel speaks of sharing the wealth. And they don't want to listen to the Gospel. They're sincere in that too."

Jesus answered the evil spirit saying: "Be silent, and leave that man!"

TERESITA: “That's what you can say to a person who's defending oppression. That's the way to shut him up.”

LAUREANO: “And wouldn't it be, too, that he shut him up because this evil spirit was denouncing him? Because he's calling him God's Saint, which means Messiah, Liberator, and he shouted it so all the people would know it and would screw him. It's like if someone came up to me here in church and shouted: ‘You're a communist!’ And that's another reason why Jesus shouted to him: ‘Be silent!’”

JOSE: “It said before that Jesus taught with a lot of authority. And here he spoke with even more authority and he silenced him once and for all. There he showed his authority by ordering the demon to leave the man: ‘Be silent and leave this man!’”

Then the evil spirit threw the man to the ground in front of them, and came out of him without doing him any harm. They were frightened and they said: “What words are these? This man gives orders to the evil spirits with authority and power, and they leave!”

OSCAR: “They were frightened because they were on the side of the evil one. And when they heard these words they saw that he had more power than they or rather, than the devil had. And because of this they were puzzled and thoughtful. They said: ‘He can do more than this one.’”

EDUARDO: “They saw that he was leaving people free…”

MARIA: “That's why they said, ‘What words are these?’ Because they had already heard his words, his teachings, which were words of liberation. And now they see them fulfilled.”

TOMAS: “The demon also walks around here among us and we're tempted by him at every step. He walks around here, in some places more than in others…”

ALEJANDRO: “In Solentiname less than in others, in Managua more than here.”

FELIX: “There the evil one does all kinds of evil.”

And there was talk of Jesus in all the places of the region.

One said: “And so the authorities were already on their guard, from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, because of what was shouted by that devil who was a spy.”

And another: “Every spy is somebody with an evil spirit, but the spirit can leave him, like what happened to that man who was freed. The same thing could happen to that spy Mario that we had, whose name wasn't even Mario. This system we have put that spirit in him, but he can be free too some day.”

And PEDRO said: “And don't you think it has a special meaning that the Gospel tells us that the man with the evil spirit was in a church?”

15.

The Miraculous Catch

(Luke 5:1–11)

We had gone to celebrate the Eucharist on Deer Island, and we were gathered in the open air near the hut of a *campesino*, with the lake in front of us, deep blue, and our boats very close to us tied to the shore. A boy from Deer Island had read:

> *Jesus saw two empty boats on the lake, near the shore, for the fishermen had left them and they were washing their nets*.

And NATALIA said: “When he saw the boats and the nets on the shore he decided to go fishing, too. And he got into a boat and sat on the gunwale and began to tell them his parables like a fisherman throwing out his net. When he saw the people crowded on the coast, he felt like he was a fisher of people. And then he got the idea of inviting the owners of the boats to become fishers of people, too.”

DON JOSE CHAVARRIA, who lives on Deer Island: “The news had spread all over that he was the Messiah and the poor people came looking for him to liberate them from all their troubles and afflictions and he had pity on them and got into the boat to give them his message of liberation from there. And when he saw that there were a lot of them and that there were a lot more in the whole messed up world, then he said to the ones who were fishing there: ‘Change your jobs, help me to liberate these people.’”

> *When he finished speaking, he said to Simon: “Take the boat to the deep part and cast your nets to fish.” Simon answered him: “Master,*

we have been working all night without catching anything; but since you command it I'm going to cast the net." When they did so they caught so much fish that the net began to break.

Old TOMAS PEÑA, who is a great fisherman: "Maybe all this happened because they'd been having hard luck. They'd worked all night without catching a single fish. There was no point in throwing out any more nets. But since he said so…Simon said: 'I'm going to throw it!' Just out of faith in him. It wasn't because of anything else. He knew they were having bad luck."

And somebody added: "It was because of that faith of his that they made that catch."

And still another said: "He called him Master because he listened to his teachings. He wasn't just worried about washing the nets."

FELIPE: "I think he saw him like somebody who was leading them, and he was teaching them something very real."

JULIO: "Even though he was one of them. He was a working man. Simon wasn't following him yet. He was just the owner of the boat. But he hears these teachings that Jesus tells the people from the boat, and from then on he calls him Master. And when Jesus tells him to cast the dragnet, he obeys him. He tells him: 'But since you command it, I'm going to cast it.' Do you suppose this has anything to do with our lives?"

"Of course it can," said DON JOSE. "It makes us see that faith is everything. Because he already understood, even though he was an ignorant man. He was already coming to know who Jesus was, and he had a great faith."

"A man who has no faith has nothing," exclaimed NATALIA.

And I said that we find a practical lesson for ourselves: that with faith we can perform miracles.

TOMAS PEÑA: "As I see it Jesus was sorry for those people and wanted to help them. And he sees that a miracle would be a good thing, but he can't give them riches because you don't get saved with riches. You get corrupted instead. And then he orders Peter, or Simon Peter, to perform a humble miracle: to catch fish. A miracle not of riches but of humbleness. Nobody was going to get rich from it, but they were going to believe in his word, in his humble teaching. So here among us anybody who wants to perform

miracles shouldn't go thinking that making riches is performing a miracle. Because for miracles you have to be humble."

I asked whether there wasn't some other teaching of Jesus in that humble miracle of a net with fishes.

And one of the boys from Fernando Island said: "Maybe I see it, Ernesto. Because it seems to me that the business about the net and the fish is to picture for us another miracle he was going to perform later. Because this miracle of the fish, maybe we were seeing it before only as the fish in the net, but now we see something else. Because the net could have been his teaching, and the fish could have been us, going into the net."

CHAEL: "Do you remember that song, how does it go?"

Several (singing): "You have to let yourself be caught…"

NATALIA: "Caught by Christ! Caught!"

FELIPE PEÑA: "Yes, by Christ! Not by anybody else. You have to know who you're going to let catch you. Because that's what I see here in the net and the fish. And the first one caught was Peter."

When he saw this, Simon Peter knelt down before Jesus and said to him: "Go apart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."

OSCAR: "Maybe he has the experience, then, of being a sinner. Of course, he was one, just like any one of us is a sinner, but he hadn't felt it before. And now, when he saw himself involved in the miracle, well, he felt bad, I don't know, all beaten down, like."

And one of the Altamiranos of Deer Island, who catch sawfish, said: "Maybe the fish is a kind of lack of faith, right? Faith in yourself, in other people, in everyone, right? Because this isolates you. If you don't have faith in anything, well, you're isolated. Lack of faith is a sin, then. Peter lacked faith, and that's why the Master told him to cast the net, right?"

JULIO MAIRENA: "I believe this way, Ernesto. Look: The world is always full of complexes. The poor have a complex about smart people and about the rich (who are educated). Peter felt inferior, felt that he couldn't stay in God's presence, since he didn't know that Jesus was coming for the sinners and the poor. And he didn't take into account that Jesus, even though he was smart, was also a poor man himself. He thought they couldn't be in the same place together."

I said that perhaps this complex that Julio was talking about was the same one that the Gospels described as a fear. And we read the following verses:

> *Because Simon was amazed, and also all those who were with him, by the catch that they had made. Also Jacob and John, the sons of Zebediah, who were companions of Simon, were amazed*.

MARCELINO: “I think you'll always find this fear in the poor. If one fellow has cash, the poor think that he'll be able to order them around and that they can't resist. And somebody with a lot of education makes us feel useless too. We're always afraid that somebody who is more educated is going to reject us.”

> *But Jesus said to Simon: “Do not be afraid; from now on you're going to be a fisher of men.”*

DON JULIO GUEVARA, who was also a famous fisherman: “He wanted to tell him in a word that he was going to be equal to him, right? Jesus was a fisher of men.”

And one of the young people said: “He looked for country people and fishermen to do his work, not aristocrats. And it's because the workers are the ones who really transform the world and are called to be the masters of the world. Even though a lot of them don't know it; but Jesus, he knew it.”

One of the girls: “Of course he wasn't going to look for bums, exploiters, parasites of society. He looked for workingmen, people with a job, like these fishers of fish that he made into fishers of men.”

And one of the ladies: “So they in turn could look for other humble people, that nobody paid any attention to before. People who didn't count for anything. Just like Jesus told Peter to cast the net where he thought there was nothing, and up came a terrific catch.”

OLIVIA: “Think of this: All us people gathered here used to be scattered, with our own selfishness and individualism, slipping away from each other, as slippery as fishes…We're the miraculous catch.”

> *Then, when they brought the boats ashore, they left everything and went away with Jesus*.

Young JULIO: “Well, they went away with him out of the faith they already had in him. And what they were taking away was a marvelous thing, confidence in this miracle worker who performed the miracle of the big catch for them and at the same time the feeling that somebody so miraculous had confidence in them…”

NATALIA: “Then they abandoned their belongings. Yes, they left the boats right there and the nets.”

RODOLFO: “Probably a rotten boat like the one that belongs to the Cooperative.”

NATALIA: “They were poor, but they had their few things. The way poor people do. And they left their things right there and followed Jesus.”

DOÑA ANGELA: “They let themselves be caught by him.”

Another of the boys said: “That was the miraculous catch, and not the haddock and shad and mojarras and all the other different fish they caught with the net. And they caught us and that's why we're gathered here, as Doña Olivia says.”

MARCELINO: “Because they left their belongings right there, the word of God came to these islands. Perhaps later we can carry the word to the other side of the lake too. To Papaturro, or maybe San Carlos, San Miguelito…”

DON JULIO: “Before we used to be only fishers of fish from the lake here, but now we can be fishers of men too, if we get rid of our belongings.”

And FELIPE said: “That's the thing, Ernesto. I think that since we are or are going to be fishermen, we have to be very careful not to want to fish for our own personal interests. In Christian religions there are a lot of people who are just trying to take advantage of others. And the catch of Jesus Christ is for the good of humanity. It's the catch of love.”

ALEJANDRO: “Maybe a lot of times we feel like somebody who's worked all night without catching anything, and he's all worn out, and he doesn't want to fish any more. And we feel that other people in other parts of Nicaragua and in other countries are the same way; they haven't caught anything. But let's not be discouraged, because this is a miraculous catch. And when we least expect it the terrific catch will be brought up.”

When we finished, a fresh breeze was blowing from the south and the lake was beginning to ripple.

16.

The Wedding at Cana

(John 2:1–12)

We commented on the Gospel in the meeting hut after we had a lunch of rice and beans with some breadfruit that Octavio brought from Stork Island.

We read how Jesus went with his mother and his disciples to a wedding in a small town.

> *The wine was gone, and Jesus' mother said to him: "They have no more wine." But Jesus answered her: "Woman, why do you tell that to me? My hour has not yet come." But she said to those who were serving: "Do whatever he tells you."*

I said that Jesus' words—"Why do you tell that to me?"—according to the latest biblical studies, are very strong words. In other parts of the Bible they always appear in lawsuits or when someone is being injured by someone else, and it's something like our expression "Stop bugging me."

I waited to see what their comments would be and, after a long silence, OLIVIA spoke: "His hour, which hadn't come, was the hour of his death. He shouldn't be performing miracles yet, presenting himself as the Messiah who was coming to do good and to liberate the people, because then the powerful would kill him. That's why he says to her: 'Woman, stop bugging me, my hour hasn't yet come.'"

We all saw that the explanation was very clear. There was another long pause, and then MARCELINO spoke: "Following up on what Olivia said, I see that Mary's attitude is a good example. Jesus may have been afraid. It's very natural for somebody to be afraid of death. Later he was afraid in the garden

when his hour came. Or maybe it was just prudence. It's all the same. But anyway Mary here doesn't seem to be afraid or to pay any attention to prudence, but she urges him to perform the miracle. He didn't want to get into being a Messiah yet, and she pushes him into it. It seems like she's saying: ‘It doesn't matter if they give us a hard time.’ And she calls the servants.”

ALEJANDRO: “That's the way that every revolutionary mother ought to be with her revolutionary son. Instead of trying to talk him out of it, telling him ‘don't get involved,’ she urges him to fulfill his mission. She pushes him.”

WILLIAM: “This reminds me of the conversations that Father Camilo's mother said she used to have with her son, after dinner, when he got mixed up in politics. He would say to her, ‘Mama, when they kill me…’ And she would say, ‘Son, when they kill you…’ Here Jesus is simply telling her that they're going to screw him. It was a fact that the two of them had already calmly accepted.”

CARLOS ALBERTO: “It was all because of a nice couple who had invited them and who were going to be in a mess and the only thing to do was to perform the miracle. By doing this he was already pushing himself into his public life, I mean, into struggle, and now he was going to begin to be persecuted. I see that right after this, in the following passage, Saint John already has Jesus driving the money changers out of the temple, and also talking about his death. So it's clear that this miracle speeded things up.”

And MARIA VICTORIA, the wife of Carlos Alberto: “It's clear that she already knew he was in agreement, because she doesn't answer when he tells her that she's getting him involved. She just calls the ones who are serving so that he can give them wine.”

MANUEL: “And isn't it interesting that Jesus gets himself involved for a party? His hour will come sooner because he gave wine at a party. It wasn't for something more serious.”

ANGEL: “It must be to show us that liquor is good, and that people can be happy at a party. We see that Christ didn't think like the Protestants of the Church of the Nazarene, who say that it's a sin to drink or smoke or dance or sing…”

And JESUS CHAVARRIA (CHUCHU), a young man who was studying in Masaya and who had come here for a week: “But it was also because

afterwards he was going to change the wine into his blood, in the Eucharist."

> *There were six stone jars there, of the kind that Jews use in their purification ceremonies. Each jar could hold about eighty to a hundred quarts of water. Jesus said to the servants: "Fill these jars with water."*

PABLO HURTADO: "By this he shows that he had no respect for these purification ceremonies. The conversion of the purification water into wine is also a symbol of the conversion of the legalistic law of the Jews into a law of love. If all the water that they had for purifying themselves turned into wine on them, now how were they going to perform their ceremonies? I'm sure some of them must have asked him: 'Master, and now how do I purify myself?' And he must have answered them: 'The orders are to have a drink.'"

DON JULIO: "I see one thing: Those jugs held a lot of water. That means that they held a lot of purification. They were very extreme. And he went to the other extreme by giving them a lot of liquor."

PABLO: "Six hundred quarts. They really got plastered."

I said: "There were people who didn't drink wine and who fasted a lot, the Essenes…the disciples of John the Baptist…very strict people like those brothers of ours who go to the Nazarene Temple on Carolina Island. And they were probably scandalized to see Jesus perform such a profane miracle."

> *The man in charge of the party tasted the water that had turned to wine, without knowing where it was from; only the servants knew, for they had drawn the water*.

OSCAR: "It seems to me that the wine means joy, a party. To be happy. Enjoyment. Also love. He wanted to make us see that he was bringing enjoyment, happiness, a party."

OLIVIA: "Joy. And also unity. Wine unites. He was coming to bring about unity among people. But liquor can separate too, and lead to quarrels, stabbings…"

ANGEL: "Also, when rich people drink liquor in selfish parties, it doesn't create any unity. There's no brotherhood there—at least, for the poor people

who are being excluded…”

I said that in the Old Testament the messianic era had often been described as an epoch of great abundance of wine. The prophet Amos had said that when the Messiah came there would be great harvests of wheat and grapes, and that the hills would distill wine. Isaiah says that God was going to prepare a banquet for all the peoples, with very good meat and very good wines. And he had also prophesied about the Messiah, saying that “he would not be sad.” By this miracle Christ is making it clear that he is the promised Messiah.

MARCELINO: “We see then that he was coming to bring unity and brotherhood among people. That's the wine he brought. If there's no brotherhood among people there's no joy. Like a party where people are divided, where they don't all share alike, it's a party without joy. A person's birthday or saint's day is not a happy party if there's division…”

“Or if they stab each other,” said ANDREA, Oscar's wife.

MARCELINO went on: “So a society with quarrels, with social classes, can't have a true banquet, a true party.”

WILLIAM: “The party will be the kingdom of God, that new society. And that's why Christ, when he said goodbye to his disciples at the Last Supper, he told them that he wouldn't drink wine any more until he drank it with them in that kingdom.”

CARLOS ALBERTO: “He also spoke of his doctrine as a wine. The new wine that breaks the old wineskins…”

FELIPE: “I think that Jesus liked to drink. He made his first declaration as Messiah with wine. He also made his Eucharist with wine. They accused him because he drank with sinners. He said that in the kingdom he was going to get drunk with us, or that he was going to drink wine with us (the same thing). What *is* clear is that he didn't want to drink alone, or with a few people the way the rich do while most of humanity suffers, but with everybody, even with the poorest little person, and that's why he'll drink with us even in the kingdom of heaven. There there'll be wine in abundance, and not just wine, because there are people that drink other things: beer, rum, *chicha, guaro, cuzuza*. And there'll be plenty of liquor there, because he'll be with us.”

PABLO: “You remember when he said that his disciples didn't fast like Saint John the Baptist's disciples because they were celebrating because he was the bridegroom, but when they killed him then they really would fast?

He means that now we can't have celebrations or parties like the rich have because Christ is still being crucified in the poor. Not because parties are evil or fasting is good, like the disciples of John the Baptist believed, but because of solidarity with the poor."

JOSE ALANIZ, Olguita's husband: "I think we should ask for wine for everybody, like Christ taught us to ask for bread in the Our Father. Bread and wine are equally important. Bread is the food and wine is the joy, and that's why he made one miracle with bread and another with wine. Because there are so many poor people, who don't have any parties, drunken brawls maybe, but not joy. The joy of the kingdom will come when everybody loves each other and everybody is friends."

TERESITA, William's wife: "But it wasn't at any old party that he performed the miracle. It was at a wedding party."

OLGUITA: "The wedding meant that he was coming to bring love."

I said that it had often been prophesied also that the messianic era would be like a wedding with God. Isaiah had said to Israel: "As a boy marries a girl, so he who formed you will marry you, and as the husband enjoys his wife, so you will be the delight of your God." And I said too that the Song of Songs is a book that speaks of that wedding. There the wife asks him to kiss her and says that his caresses are better than wine. He tells her that her eyes are like doves and that her breasts are like two fawns grazing among the lilies. She says that the time of the songs has come, that the rain has ended, and that the vines are fragrant. He tells her that her love is better than wine, that under her tongue are milk and honey, that her belly is like a little hill of wheat surrounded by lilies, that in her he has drunk his wine and his milk. And she says that she exists for her lover and her lover exists for her. Jesus wanted to make it clear that with his arrival, this wedding was now here. John the Baptist, when he called him Messiah, had called him the bridegroom. And Jesus himself said that his disciples didn't fast because he was the bridegroom. And in several parables he spoke of the kingdom of heaven as a marriage, or as a wedding feast, and of himself as bridegroom.

FELIPE: "There will be no lonely people, no frustrated ones then, will there? This love is going to be for everyone, for every single one. No one will be excluded from that wedding. That will be true social justice."

JOSE ALANIZ said: "That's right. You don't just need bread and wine and all the harvests. You also need love. You have to satisfy that need of love."

I said: “That's right. No one will be left without those kisses, without that wine of the Song of Songs.”

OLIVIA: “Everybody, men, women, old people, children, even nursing babies, we all form a single body: humanity, the bride loved by God.”

LAUREANO: “Or we're struggling to form it. This struggle is the Revolution.”

ALEJANDRO: “Now I see more clearly why we all have to love each other. Now I see it very clearly: humanity, men, women, children, everybody, is a wonderful thing now that God is in love with it. And if it's so wonderful for him, it must be wonderful for us too. And so it's very important to make it be perfect, be holy, and this is the Revolution.”

CARLOS ALBERTO: “God is Love. Humanity is going to get married to Love.”

> *And so the one in charge called the bridegroom and said to him: “Everybody serves first the best wine, and when the guests have drunk quite a bit, then the ordinary wine is served. But you left the best wine for the last.”*

ANGEL MAYORGA: “It's obvious. At the beginning of a party you serve *Flor de Caña* Rum or *Victoria* Beer. Afterwards, when everybody's loaded, you serve *cuzuza.”* (Everyone laughs.)

OLIVIA: “The joys of the world are best at first and afterwards they change into disappointments. With the joy that God gives it's just the opposite.”

MARCELINO: “It seems to me that the joy of brotherhood, the perfect society that God is preparing for humanity, that's the great party. But the best wine of that party will be the last one: eternal life.”

17.

The Beatitudes

(Matthew 5:1–12)

We read that Jesus went up to a hill, and said to his disciples gathered around him:

> *Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

I said that in the Bible the poor are often called *anawim*, which in Hebrew means “the poor of Yahweh.” They are so called because they are the poor of the liberation of Yahweh, those that God is going to liberate by means of the Messiah. It's like what we now understand as the “oppressed,” but in the Bible those poor people are also considered to be good people, honorable, kindly and holy, while their opposites are the oppressors, the rich, the proud, the impious. This word *anawim* was probably the one that Jesus used. In Greek there was no word like that, and when the Gospel of Matthew was translated into Greek that word was translated as “poor in spirit,” whereas Luke in his Beatitudes says simply “the poor.” This phrase of Matthew, “poor in spirit,” has created confusion, and many have believed that it deals with spiritual poverty. And I said that I met a priest who said that the “poor in spirit” were the good rich people.

OLIVIA: “The poor in spirit or the poor in God are the poor, but provided they have the spirit of the oppressed and not of the oppressors, provided they don't have the mentality of the rich.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “Because us poor people can also have pride, like the rich.”

ANGEL: “Us poor people can also be exploiters. As for the kingdom of heaven, I say what I've already said other times, that Matthew calls the kingdom of God the kingdom of heaven because of the Jewish custom of not mentioning the name of God out of respect, but that doesn't mean that the kingdom is in ‘heaven.’ In the other Gospels it is called the kingdom of God. Jesus surely must have used the same words Matthew used, because as a good Jew Jesus would follow the custom of not mentioning the name of God. Because of this expression Christians have for centuries wrongly believed that he's speaking only about a kingdom in the beyond.”

And MARIITA said: “It's here on earth, but it's also in heaven after death.”

Another said: “Yes, because there are so many poor people who die without having any happiness, and why are they called happy then?”

And another: “Like little old Don Chico who just died all alone. When they found him the ants were eating him.”

And LAUREANO, who always talks about the Revolution: “But you can't forget that the kingdom is here too. Because they're thinking about heaven, poor people often don't fight.”

His cousin OSCAR: “Well, if they don't fight for their brothers and sisters and their children they don't get to the other kingdom after they die.”

And OSCAR'S MOTHER: “It seems to me that the kingdom is love. Love in this life. And heaven is for those who love here, because God is love.”

FELIPE: “Jesus said that because he knows the poor are able to put love into practice better, right?—which is the kingdom that God brings us. Then he blesses the poor because they're the ones who are going to make this new society of love.”

“And it's because the rich couldn't practice love, then,” said JULIO.

I asked why not. And he answered: “Because of their great selfishness, they can't say that they can love. But the poor can, because as oppressed people they do not exploit and they are less selfish.”

I said that was true, that the rich in some way always made money at the cost of the poor, making other people work for them, and using the money from that work to make more money at the cost of more work by others. Then, as long as it's that way, as Felipe says, they can't love their fellow human beings, unless they divide up their riches and stop exploiting.

OSCAR: “Ernesto, I also think that the poor person can practice love more sincerely, without being afraid, and fight for it, without being afraid of the word of God. But the rich person can't because it doesn't suit him. Even

though he may know what's good, he doesn't practice it, because he is always ready to screw people, to exploit them. And that's why I think a rich person can never be sincere, while the poor person can. And God sees the poor person's sincerity and promises him the kingdom of God."

MARCELINO: "The way I see it is that the man who owns a business whether he needs money or doesn't need it, he's always doing business. The poor person says: 'I have a piece of *tortilla* and somebody else doesn't have any, so I'll give him some of my piece.' There is a difference between the spirit of the man who owns a business and the man who doesn't own one. I was talking with a man and I was saying: 'What would you do for a man who was in great need and you were selling a boat that cost a thousand *pesos*, would you let him have it for five hundred?' And he said to me: 'Why should I? Business is business.' And he's a rich man." "Well, that's just why he's a rich man," somebody answered.

And ALEJANDRO: "What we see here is that there are two things. One is the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of love, of equality, where we must all be like brothers and sisters; and the other thing is the system we have, which isn't brand new, it's centuries old, the system of rich and poor, where business is business. And so we see that they're very different things. Then we have to change society so that the kingdom of God can exist. And we're sure that the kingdom will have to be established with the poor, right?"

PANCHO: "With everybody that shares the love, because if there are rich people that share the love, they too can enter the kingdom."

MARIITA: "But a rich person that shares love has to share his goods too. That's how he shows that he shares love. Because if he says he has love and doesn't share his goods, how are we going to believe him?"

REBECA: "But it's all the same. Some of us, even though we're poor, we don't inherit the kingdom of God either. If we're poor and don't have love. And there are rich people who have the kingdom of God, if they have love."

ANGEL: "That's why it seems to me that we have to interpret carefully. If we just stick to the fact that we're poor and God has said that the kingdom of God is for the poor, then we'd end up saying that, well, since we're poor we already have the kingdom of God and we can do anything! And the rich are going to be condemned because they're rich. So we have to interpret carefully what God says. Let's not think that just because we're poor we already have the kingdom of God."

OSCAR: “I think we have to be clear about this. You either love God or you love money. You decide to make money? Well, go love your money, that's your god. Somebody else loves God? He shares his money and is poor. Then he really can live love.”

PANCHO: “But there are rich people who share…”

JULIO: “But maybe just a little. And it's to quiet their consciences. Or they give away their money but they give it, maybe, for great temples, for huge churches with good-looking saints, and they don't give a damn for their neighbor, shit on their neighbor. And I don't think that's sharing love, in my thinking.”

I said: “Then we're quite clear about what the kingdom of God is, and why Jesus blesses the poor, telling them that that kingdom will be theirs. The other Beatitudes seem to be only other ways of saying the same thing. In all of them the same poor people are spoken of by other names, and what they promise is the same thing.”

> *Blessed are those who are sad in heart, for God will give them consolation. Blessed are the humble in heart, for they shall inherit the earth that God has promised them. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, because they will be fed. Blessed are those who have compassion for others, for God will have compassion for them. Blessed are those with pure hearts, for they shall see God. Blessed are those who bring about peace, for they will be called the children of God. Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

First we commented on the sad in heart, who will have consolation.

TOMAS PEÑA: “I look at, how shall I say it, the relief that Christ gave to the poor when he came, because they felt so alone, and the rich were rich, and the poor were almost an abandoned class. And then when Christ came he gave them that consolation. Us poor people, the poorer we are and the more we suffer, then the happier we must be because we have been chosen for the kingdom. Well, that's what I think. But others think different. And then we don't follow what the Book says here, and maybe we get things confused.”

And FELIPE, his son: “Well, it may be something for the poor to be proud of to know that we have been chosen for the kingdom. But we also have to

remember that Jesus doesn't want people to go on being oppressed. He came to liberate humanity, so that the world won't be divided into rich and poor, and he doesn't want everyone to be poor. We can be happy about the news that the kingdom is coming, but we can't be satisfied until it comes."

REBECA: "And he blesses those of humble heart. It seems to me that these are the poor in heart or the humbled. Maybe they were even humbler before (that's my idea anyway) and yet for God they were the most worthy. People shouldn't feel sad, then, even though they are poor, poor in spirit or humbled, because God will bring them into the Promised Land, which is the kingdom. But those of proud heart will not enter."

ESPERANZA, a little girl, asks: "Can there be a humble rich man?"

MARIA, her sister: "Not unless he shares his wealth."

NATALIA: "Because the first Christians shared everything: land, money, houses, boats."

I said: "And it's clear that the first Christians, as we're told, before they had been given the name of Christians had given themselves the name of *anawim*, because they considered themselves the poor of the Beatitudes. And there were no rich among them because they shared everything, but neither were there any who were in need."

MARCELINO: "He blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice. Hunger and injustice amount to the same thing. Anyone who hungers for food also hungers for justice. They are the ones who are going to make social change, not the satisfied ones. And then they'll be filled with bread and social justice."

Young JULIO: "When there's a revolution in a country the poor aren't hungry anymore, and they are already building, it seems to me, as it says here, the kingdom of heaven among them. As long as there is hunger, injustice, sickness, well it seems to me that the kingdom of heaven is very far off."

ALEJANDRO: "He blesses those who have compassion. I believe that it's those who have compassion for others that become revolutionaries. There are many who are poor, or who are middle-class city people, employees who earn their little salaries but they're not rich, yet they still have the ambition of the rich. And if some time some of them get rich, they might be very cruel. Rebeca pointed out that the poor of Jesus Christ are those who practice love. The poor who are bourgeois, who are opposed to

revolutionary changes, they do not have compassion in their hearts, and they are not the poor of the Gospel."

LAUREANO: "A perfect communism is what the Gospel wants."

PANCHO, who is very conservative, said angrily: "Does that mean that Jesus was a communist?"

JULIO said: "The communists have preached what the Gospel preached, that people should be equal and that they all should live as brothers and sisters. Laureano is speaking of the communism of Jesus Christ."

And PANCHO, still angry: "The fact is that not even Laureano himself can explain to me what communism is. I'm sure he can't."

I said to Pancho: "Your idea of communism comes from the official newspaper or radio stations, that communism's a bunch of murderers and bandits. But the communists try to achieve a perfect society where each one contributes his labor and receives according to his needs. Laureano finds that in the Gospels they were already teaching that. You can refuse to accept communist ideology but you do have to accept what you have here in the Gospels. And you might be satisfied with this communism of the Gospels."

PANCHO: "Excuse me, but do you mean that if we are guided by the word of God we are communists?"

I: "In that sense, yes, because we seek the same perfect society. And also because we are against exploitation, against capitalism."

REBECA: "If we come together as God wishes, yes. Communism is an equal society. The word 'communist' means community. And so if we all come together as God wishes, we are all communists, all equal."

WILLIAM: "That's what the first Christians practiced, who had everything in common."

PANCHO: "I believe that that communism is a failure."

TOMAS: "Well, communism, the kind you hear about, is one thing. But this communism, that we should love each other…"

PANCHO: "Enough of that!"

REBECA: "It is community. Communism is community."

TOMAS: "This communism says: Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

PANCHO: "But every communist speaks against all the others. That means they don't love each other."

ELVIS: "No, man. None of them talk that way, man. They do tell us about their programs. And they're fine."

FELIPE: “The Gospel blesses the poor who have clean hearts. The truth is that they're not all like that, because many have the mentality of the rich. Especially since it's the rich who educate us. On the radio, in the ads, they are forcing their mentality into us; it's completely the rich man's.”

WILLIAM: “What Felipe says is quite true. The poor person naturally looks forward to getting out of his misery. But advertising creates false needs in the poor person, making him yearn for what he doesn't need. To build the kingdom of love (and that is to see God) you must be stripped of those ambitions, you must have a clean heart.”

MANUEL ALVARADO: “It seems to me that ambition is what makes for disputes and that's why he blesses that kind of poor people, because they don't try to strip anybody of anything. If you're going to take somebody else's land away from him, you need a weapon. That's why there are so many armaments in the country. If I have a worker and I make him work for a wage that doesn't give him enough to eat, I'm not looking for peace, I'm looking for war.”

OSCAR: “If I'm trying to have one person not exploit the other, I am one who is looking for peace. He says that people who look for peace will be the children of God, because they look for unity, that we should all be brothers and sisters. It's clear that the kingdom of God belongs only to the children of God.”

His brother JULIO: “These peacemakers want to put an end to the class divisions that divide humanity, and that's why they fight, but it's not so that they can oppress others but so that nobody will oppress anybody.”

ALEJANDRO: “And he says that they are going to be persecuted because they seek justice, and for that also he blesses them. Because it's clear that people who look for this kingdom have to be persecuted. The other day I heard somebody say that there were a lot of people afraid to come to church because there was talk in church against the system. They were afraid they would be informed on, or that something would happen to them, it seems. And they themselves, the next time they see you, they look at you in a certain way. It's not proper to talk about the poor and these things.”

I said: “I've just had a visit from a young fellow from the north, from Estelí, from a poor town. He is a *campesino* like yourselves, and he was saying that there, to get together for their Masses first they have to ask permission from the police, and the police captain said that those gatherings were dangerous. The captain is right, for they gather there to talk about the

Gospels. Those Christians of the earliest Jewish community, who had taken the name *anawim* before they were called Christians, were so called not only because they were poor but also because they were persecuted. Because ‘poor of Yahweh’ (or ‘poor in spirit’ in these Beatitudes) is the same as saying persecuted.”

TOÑO: “That didn't use to happen here because the Masses were in Latin. The priest read these things but he read them in Latin, and he didn't explain them to the people. So the Gospels didn't bother the rich or the military.”

And we went on then to the two final verses:

> *Blessed are you, when people insult you and mistreat you and say all kinds of false things against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because you will receive a reward in heaven; for like you the prophets that lived before you were persecuted.*

OLIVIA: “Before he talked of people persecuted for looking for justice and now he says ‘because of me.’ He wants to point out that it's the same thing. Everyone who is persecuted in the cause of justice is persecuted in his cause. Here he is talking of insults and bad treatment, he's not talking of death. It must be because death is only in extraordinary cases (even though it can also happen). The most frequent thing is the insults and bad treatment. We're seeing it right here. They call us communists. To them that means bandits, evil people. Afterwards maybe they'll treat us badly.”

JULIO: “We have to speak of injustice, even though they say we're into political maneuvering or communism, and that people shouldn't go to our church now. People who talk like this are getting away from the true Gospel, and they're getting isolated. It seems to me that this is where we ought to feel proud, because we are not into exploitation or evil. We're just spreading the true Gospel.”

WILLIAM: “And Jesus compares us with the prophets. The prophets in the Bible were not so much people who predicted the future as people who denounced the present. They were protesting against the celebrations in the palaces, the cheating on the weights and the coins, the things that they bought very cheap from the labor of the poor, the swindles of widows and orphans, the abuses committed by the mafias of priests, the murders, the royal policy that they called prostitution, the dependence on foreign imperialisms. And it's true they also predicted something for the future—the

liberation of the oppressed. Christ says that our fate has to be like the fate of those prophets."

And another one (a member of the Youth Club) added: "What Christ says, that they will say 'all kinds of false things against you,' we have already seen it—when that spy was here who informed the Office of Security that a Peruvian was here inciting us to rebellion. And he described these Masses as meetings of conspirators, and he even gave the names of the owners of the boats that came and the number of people that came on each boat, and he said, as if it was a serious thing, that these Masses were attended by a lot of young people. Those prophets were very great men and I think it's a great honor to be compared to them, and so we ought to feel happy. And also happy for the reward we'll have in heaven, which is the same kingdom of heaven that's been promised before."

MARCELINO: "This is what the 'good news to the poor' means. The news that theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

18.

“Woe unto You Rich…!”

(Luke 6:24–26)

The previous Sunday we had seen the Beatitudes for the poor, according to Saint Matthew, and now we were going to see the curses for the rich that Saint Luke put after his Beatitudes.

> *But woe unto you rich, because you have already had your joy! Woe unto you who now are full, because you are going to be hungry! Woe unto you who now laugh, because you are going to weep in sadness!*

I said that it was curious that the reason these rich people were going to be punished was just because they were rich, because they had already had their joy, not precisely for having been evil rich people.

TOMAS PEÑA said: “Maybe they *are* evil. They are people who are treating the poor people bad. Or maybe they don't even want you to mention God, just because they've got money. And you don't have any, and you're always thinking of God or seeing what they do to get their things. And they, maybe, instead of giving, maybe they take away. That's what they've been doing for some time, and we're abandoned. It seems like it can be that way.”

ALEJANDRO: “It's logical that the Gospel should put in this counterpart, because if it only said Beatitudes for the poor you might think that there's maybe another kind of Beatitudes for the rich, or for certain rich people, or that Christ is with the poor but he's also with the rich. But Saint Luke makes it clear that it's not that way. For Christ humanity is divided into two well-defined classes, and he's in favor of one and against the other.”

LAUREANO: “This is very revolutionary. He says that all those who are well-off are going to be screwed. This turns the tables completely.”

OLIVIA: “I think that what Jesus is condemning in them is lack of feeling. Because you have to have a hard heart to be happy while others are suffering, to be full of food while others are hungry—maybe the very people that work for them.”

MARCELINO: “Not only lack of feeling. It wouldn't be so serious if they enjoyed wealth that came down to them from heaven, but their wealth is produced by the labor of others. A man has a cotton field of two thousand acres, but *he* doesn't farm two thousand acres. Other people farm the two thousand acres for him. And if he gives a party, it's with the product of that work. Instead of giving, they take away, as Don Tomas says.”

WILLIAM: “The prophets when they prophesied the future announced the salvation of the oppressed and the ruin of the oppressors. The two things correspond. They couldn't talk about salvation for everybody. And Christ preaches along the same line.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that here Jesus has put himself on the side of the poor. But the Gospels can also be the liberation of the rich. Because this change, whether they like it or not, will make them fulfill the Gospels, even though by force. But we Christians must not wait for God to do this. We have to work for it. And I believe we have an obligation to work for the liberation of the rich. Some people say, ‘What's it to us. Leave the rich the way they are, because they've got all they want!’ But I believe that Christianity should preach to them. Christ did. It's clear that he also had rich people before him, because he's talking to them: ‘Woe unto you the rich.’”

ALEJANDRO: “It's not as though when the Revolution comes they're going to be hungry or miserable. Nobody'll be miserable then. But when they lose their property they're going to feel as though they're miserable, as has happened to many who have left Cuba. And they're going to feel hunger, but it's only the hunger of their ambition.”

OLIVIA: “But this refers to the other life too. Those people that Christ was talking to didn't have to leave Cuba. Nothing happened to them. They always had everything. And so if Christ's threats are not fulfilled in the other life, then they were in vain.”

I said: “I believe that this social change is in this life and in the other.”

And we went on to the last verse:

Woe unto you when all speak well of you, for that's what their ancestors used to do with the false prophets!

I said that it had always interested me that in Christ's eyes it was bad that *all* should speak well. He did not consider the case in which opinions were divided and bad people spoke well but the good ones spoke badly, or the opposite.

CHAEL: “Could it be that the good are so few, just a handful?”

TOMAS PEÑA: “Or they are many, but poor. And many of us, like me, can't read, much less write. So nobody pays any attention to our opinions. Jesus said: ‘When all speak well…’ or ‘when all speak badly…. ’ He's talking about all those who speak. Those on the radio, for example.”

LAUREANO: “The priests who are on the side of capitalism, for example. On the radio you hear people speaking well of them. And the protesters. You hear people speaking badly of them. The stations are against the rebel priests.”

I said: “It is true. Some people in Solentiname have been very surprised, and have been shocked, when the radio has spoken badly of me. But there's no reason to be surprised. The Gospel says woe unto us if all speak well. It says that that is what happened with the false prophets. In the Bible, alongside the true prophets many times the false prophets appear. They were on the payroll of the courts and they were the ones who defended the policies of the kings, soothed the consciences of the rich, led the people astray. They were opposed to any announcement of a change. Their prophecy was that nothing was going to happen, that the status quo would be maintained. Or as Isaiah says, their message was: ‘Tomorrow will be just like today.’ It's interesting what Jesus says about these false prophets, that *all* speak well of them. It is obvious. Everybody, even those who wrote history, has been on the side of the system of exploitation. The only book that was against it was the Bible.”

TOÑO: “Those false prophets began preaching only good things to the people they were leading. They're like the ones who write now in the official newspaper.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “As we say here, they were on the inside…”

And I: “They were on the inside, as Tomas says, that is, on the side of power and the status quo. And Christ says woe unto us if we choose to be on the inside.”

19.

The Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World

(Matthew 5:13–14)

We were gathered in the church, at Sunday Mass. We were commenting now on a very brief passage:

> *You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its taste, how can it be salted again? It is now no good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled by the people*.

ADAN: “It seems to me it's because every meal should have salt. A meal without salt has no taste. We must give taste to the world.”

JULIO: “By liberating it. Because a world filled with injustice is tasteless. Mainly for the poor, life like that has no taste.”

MARCELINO: “You only need a little salt, because it's strong. You add just a tiny bit. There are only a few of us, but we can give taste to the world.”

One of the Altamiranos, who are fishermen from Deer Island: “Salt is also for preserving foods. A sawfish, a shad, we salt it and it keeps.”

And DOÑA ADELA, a little old woman with a weak voice: “We are the salt of the world because we have been placed in it so the world won't rot.”

OSCAR, in a loud voice: “But also we're a salt that sometimes doesn't salt for shit. That kind of Christianity we've got to get rid of because it does more harm than good.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that the salt has got lost when instead of preserving justice on earth, Christians have let injustice multiply more, as

has happened now in capitalist society. We Christians wanted to prevent that, but we haven't. Instead, Christians have sided with injustice, with capitalism. We have sided with selfishness. We have been a useless salt."

FELIPE: "Christianity that stopped being Christian, that's the salt that doesn't salt any more."

LAUREANO: "Christianity that stopped being revolutionary, that lost its taste."

I said that once when I said Mass in Cuba, the Gospel of that Sunday was this one about salt, and I told them in my sermon that the same thing had happened to their Christianity. It was salt that no longer salted and that's why it had been thrown out and trampled, because God wasn't interested in keeping a Church like that.

ELVIS: "It seems to me that the very same thing is happening right now here. Christians don't have that Christian taste. They're simple-minded, insipid. Only the ones who are struggling for a just society are the ones who have that taste of salt."

OSCAR: "Ernesto, I'm going to ask you a question. Why is salt also considered to be a curse among us? When somebody has bad luck they say to him, 'You're salted!'"

I told Oscar that I didn't know. Perhaps it was because in ancient times when a conquering army wanted to lay waste a region it threw salt into the fields, the way the Americans now use defoliants. Jesus was probably not talking of salt in the sense of anything harmful but of something good. But salt and all the other things of the earth can be used for good or evil, as a blessing or a curse. I later said that in the Gospel according to Saint Mark there is another sentence of Jesus about salt: "Have salt within you and live in peace one with the other." I asked if anybody wanted to comment on it.

PANCHO: "I had always wracked my brains with that one, trying to understand it and not being able to. I was just going to ask you about it and now it's come up. I'm glad because I want to hear the explanation, what it means."

OLIVIA: "It's like saying, 'Love each other.'"

MARCELINO: "I think that 'salt' is the Gospel word given to us so that we'll practice it and pass it on to others, practicing love, so that everybody will have it. Because salt is a thing that you never deny to anybody. When somebody is very stingy they say that 'he wouldn't give you salt for a sour prune.' That's why Jesus says 'have salt,' which means to have love shared

out among everybody, and so we'll have everything shared out, we'll all be equal and we'll live united and in peace."

PANCHO: "Doesn't it probably mean that in spite of sin and injustice, which have always got to exist, and in spite of the salt or bad luck that is our lot, we must live in peace with one another, rich and poor?"

LAUREANO answers quickly: "How can we live in peace when some people are hurting others?"

SILVIO was at this Mass, the son of Don Fidelmo, the leading merchant in San Carlos, and SILVIO said: "Only with love can there be peace."

OLIVIA: "It's all the same, 'have love,' 'have salt.'"

MANUEL: "Yes, because anyone who doesn't have salt is sick."

You are the light of the world. A *city that is on a hilltop cannot be hidden*.

FELIX MAYORGA: "Maybe the light is the good people, who practice love. Everyone that has a good spirit and loves others, he is the light of the world. They set the example and the people will follow them, as someone follows a person that carries a lamp to light up the darkness. Or let's suppose we're lost in the dark, and there's a light. The guy that's lost looks for the light."

MARCELINO: "A lit up city that's on top of a hill can be seen from far away, as we can see the lights of San Miguelito from very far when we're rowing at night on the lake. A city is a great union of people, and as there are a lot of houses together we see a lot of light. And that's the way our community will be. It will be seen lighted from far away, if it is united by love, even though we don't have the city houses, just huts like the ones we have now, scattered here and there. But this union will shine and it's going to be seen from San Miguelito, from Papaturro, from San Carlos. And we may even get to be a city, too, because then we won't be in scattered huts the way we are now, and we'll have electric light, and when somebody goes by in a boat he'll see those lights of our union. But the thing that will shine most, and that's what Christ is talking about, is love."

20.

The Offenses

(Matthew 5:21–26)

> *You have heard that your ancestors were told: "Do not kill, for anyone who kills will have to be judged." But I tell you that anyone who gets angry with his brother he will have to be judged*.

After we had read this verse there was a long silence. Since nobody spoke I asked Tomas Peña: "What do you say, Tomas?"

He answered: "I'm thinking it over."

After another long pause, TOMAS said: "I see that there are two commandments in one. The first time was only do not kill. Now it's two in one: Do not kill, and do not hate your friend either. We shouldn't do either. And I think it's better now than the first law they had. Because Jesus doesn't want us to live with bad feeling for anybody. Let's all live like brothers and sisters, then, peaceful. Helping each other. You see? And let hatred stop."

And I commented: "It's not enough for us not to kill each other, is it? To live happily we must live like brothers and sisters, as Tomas says, that is, without hatred."

TOMAS: "And the person who lives in hatred will never be able to live in peace. He has to be fighting with a list of enemies. And if he hates, he will also be hated. And if there are quarrels, there can also be murders. And Jesus wants, then, to put an end to all fighting, to put an end to the root of evil."

MANUEL: "Well, it's a stricter law, right? More screwed up, you know what I mean? Because hell! the law of Moses used to forbid only killing.

Now it's not only that the guy who kills is condemned but the guy who gets angry with his brother. The whole thing is more complicated."

OLIVIA: "It's nicer. It's just that we have to understand this new law very well. Because it's better for us. It's not more screwed up, it's better. Because there are people who say: 'Hell, I haven't killed nobody, I haven't sinned.' And there are so many injustices committed against your neighbor that are like killing. And the root of these injustices is lack of love for our neighbor. And that's why the law of Jesus Christ is the law of love. I don't think it's more screwed up."

MANUEL: "Well, yes, of course it's better, but more difficult to obey."

OLIVIA: "Maybe because we don't want to, but if we're intelligent we can live a life of love for all. It's just if you want to."

MANUEL: "And who doesn't want to be saved, Doña Olivia? What happens is that…well, you get screwed up."

OLIVIA: "Well, when you really want to be saved, everything is easy. But if you don't, the laws are difficult. I don't find them at all difficult. What happens is that if we're selfish, everything is difficult. If we're not selfish, it's easy to help others, and it's even a pleasure. And it's easy to forgive others. Or to understand. It's the logical way that we ought to be treating each other, as brothers and sisters."

I said: "Israel had the commandment against killing, and nevertheless there were many murders in Israel, because it was a society filled with injustice and oppression. Jesus wants us to have a society in which there is no hatred or scorn or offense against anyone, that is, no injustice, and only in this way can we have a society without crimes. It's also for that very reason that Saint John says later that someone who hates his brother is a murderer (that is a way of saying that someone who commits injustices is a murderer)."

TOMAS: "The trouble is that we don't understand each other. Maybe when we're on the up and up, as the saying goes, we can say we're brothers and sisters. And maybe we love each other. But when we start drinking liquor, we act crazy and then the trouble begins. Even though you don't want to, at times the rum itself makes you misunderstand, and then you get in a fight."

One of the boys said to him: "But that must be because you already had hatred in your heart."

TOMAS: "Maybe not sometimes. Because I've seen that maybe some who are close pals, who give each other cigarettes, give this or that, are getting

along fine, you know? But after some rum, one little word…”

Another of the boys: “False friends, Don Tomas?”

TOMAS: “No, because I've watched some of them and it's clear that they like each other. But at those times, one swallow, two swallows, and that's it. One says to the other: You're a son-of-a-so-and-so. Maybe because the other guy respected him, he didn't say anything. But after a while the other one says something, with more rum, and he contradicts him, you see, and there you are…. I think drinking rum is the most dangerous thing for us here on earth.”

One of the girls: “For the people. Let's say for the poor, because the rich get slaughtered in a different way.”

TOMAS: “But if one of them commits a crime nothing happens to him. He pays and gets off free. But not us. Whether we punch somebody or if somebody punches us. Maybe the fellow that got punched is sick because he doesn't have anything to take care of himself with, and the other fellow's in jail because he doesn't have any way to get out of jail. In any case, we all lose.”

> *A man who insults his brother will be judged by the Supreme Tribunal; and a man who calls his brother an idiot is in danger of hell's fire.*

I said that the Supreme Tribunal, or *Sanhedrin*, was the highest authority of the Jews. As for what is here translated as “hell's fire,” it is something that Christ called in his language “*Gehenna* of fire.” *Gehenna* was the rubbish heap of Jerusalem, and as they were accustomed to burn the rubbish, there were often fires there. In the time of Christ, *Gehenna* already meant also a place of punishment in the other life, what we call hell. It's hard to know if Christ here is really referring to hell or if it's only a way of speaking.

And OSCAR said: “I imagine that, since our Jerusalem must be a city of love, anyone who hates cannot be in it. Anyone who can't get along with his neighbors gets shoved out, like rubbish, like Ge…what did you call it? Well, like something useless.”

“And the fire is for everything useless,” added ANDREA, his wife.

TOMAS: “Maybe somebody that says ‘idiot’ is more of an idiot than the fellow he's talking to—right?—because he doesn't understand him. And it

also seems to me that a guy who calls somebody an idiot doesn't realize the insult that's in the word ‘idiot’ and so he's a fool to say it.”

I said: “But the greatest insult to our neighbor is exploitation—keeping people in an inferior social class…”

And FELIPE added: “They think that poor people are animals, they treat them like animals, and they give them no education.”

DANIEL: “And the boss is always yelling at the workers, calling them idiots, and the workers have to put up with it.”

ROSITA: “But we're used to that word ‘idiot’ in our homes: ‘Where is that idiot’?”

DANIEL: “Christ is referring to another way of using it. It's when the boss says to the worker: ‘You're an animal!’ or when he says to him: ‘Imbecile!’ It's not like saying it informally or among friends.”

I said: “Jesus is referring here to any insult said to a brother and he gives this word as a simple example. But he doesn't mean that we can't use it or that we can use it only informally. With the Pharisees he used very similar words. He often called them ‘blind and stupid’ (in addition to ‘hypocrites’ and ‘race of vipers’).”

> *And so if you take your offering to the altar and there you remember that your brother has a quarrel with you, leave your offering right there before the altar and go first to make your peace with your brother. Then you can return to the altar and make your offering*.

TOMAS: “It seems to me that these offerings at the temple were like a thing that one goes to give with love. For instance, if I was going to the temple and I was not friendly with a certain person and I was still going to give the offering, then I wouldn't be doing anything, like a person who is not going to give with love but just not to be left out. It seems to me that that's the way we should understand what he says about offerings.”

OLIVIA: “Those offerings could be to beg forgiveness for sins, but Jesus says that you have to beg the forgiveness of the offended person before you ask for God's forgiveness. Or the offerings could be to please God, but if I'm filled with hate, God is not grateful to me. The love we have for each other, that's the best offering we can make to God.”

I said: “The Jews believed in these sacrifices in the temple, and Jesus here is not telling them not to make them but that first they must have love

among themselves. But later Jesus gradually taught them that those sacrifices were unnecessary, and that the only sacrifice that pleases God is love for others, and later on his disciples totally eliminated sacrifices. Saint Paul says that serving others and living with possessions in common are the sacrifices that please God."

JULIO RAMON: "And what can we say then of all those celebrations that the rich have in the churches? They ought to stop them, because God is not interested in that."

ADAN: "Only when there is a reconciliation in society and an end to all exploitation and class division, only then can there be a true offering to God, right?"

TOMAS: "Yes."

I: "That's why Father Camilo Torres believed that to celebrate an authentic Eucharist he had to fight first for social change."

FELIPE: "For the community of property."

> *If someone sues you and takes you to court, come to an agreement with him on the way, so he won't turn you over to the judge; because if he does, the judge will turn you over to the police and they will put you in jail. In truth I say to you that you will not get out of there until you pay the last cent*.

MANUEL: "That also is reconciliation."

OLIVIA: "It's like Tomas said, because if two poor people fight it makes business for the authorities. It means that love and harmony are very good for the poor. Because, look, each lawsuit means money that they'll take away from you, until you pay the last cent. They'll take all they want away from you."

TOMAS: "And if you don't have it you'll have to go looking for it. Go in debt with the boss. The guy that does that is in for trouble. He doesn't go to jail but he'll have to figure out how to pay. In the long run he's maybe worse off than the fellow who's in jail."

RAUL: "He's telling us not to be saps, that if the laws are repressive, it's better for us to settle things among ourselves and not fall under the forces of repression."

I: "This has a lot to do with the reality of our present system, and it also had meaning in the time of Christ. But it seems to me that he is not referring

to this reality but giving us a parable."

RAUL: "But here he's talking about the judge and the police and jail…"

DONALD, a young man who is studying in a little town in Costa Rica and has come home to spend the vacation, said: "In a revolutionary system there are also judges and police and jails."

OLIVIA: "So then I understood it right."

RAUL: "Right. That's the way it is."

OLIVIA: "I understood it right."

RAUL: "He's talking to the exploiters, and it's as if we already have revolutionary tribunals, then."

FELIPE: "To every unjust person he's saying that he ought to work things out as good as he can."

RAUL: "If everyone followed the advice that he's just given we wouldn't need any revolutionary tribunals, then."

JULIO RAMON: "We're not going to need police or judges or anything."

MANUEL: "We won't need them. Yes, in a just society there's no need for any repression."

I said: "Because then there will only be love among brothers. But earlier Jesus said that every offense will be punished as murder was punished under the law of Moses. He spoke of hatred, insults, and scorn towards brothers. And he ended by saying to the oppressors that they better come to an understanding with their victims in time when they see that they are going to sue them."

RAUL: "Because if they don't they get shot."

I: "They get shot or they go to hell. Jesus doesn't make it very clear if he's referring to punishments in this life or in the next one. First he spoke of the punishment of the *Sanhedrin*, which is an earthly punishment, and afterwards he spoke of *Gehenna*, which had an otherwordly meaning. Perhaps he wanted to leave it unclear so that we could interpret it as we wished. Or perhaps he is referring to the two punishments at the same time."

DONALD: "I don't know why, but that business of having to pay 'to the last cent' sounds to me as though we'll have to pay also in the next life."

GLORIA: "If the capitalists did what he says there'd be no need of a violent change."

ADAN: "But the deal with the poor man has to be an honest one."

RAUL: "That is, repay the victim with love, right?"

21.

Jesus Teaches How to Pray

(Matthew 6:7–15)

We read the passage where Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, with the words that have traditionally been called the “Our Father.” First he warned them:

> *When you pray, do not talk a lot, like pagans, who with all their words think they are going to be listened to*.

I said that the translation is rather: “Don't go blah-blah-blah-blah like the pagans.” For the Greek word that Matthew uses is *battalogein*, which is like saying “blah-blah-blah-blah.”

WILLIAM: “It seems to me that if Christ tells them not to pray like pagans it's because the Jews prayed like pagans. And somewhere else Christ throws it in the Pharisees’ faces that they said long prayers. And I think the same thing can be said of the Christians, that they pray like pagans, because the way they pray is like the Jews and the other religions. Jesus’ criticism is very serious, because it's condemning the customary way of praying in all religions, and he classifies it as pagan. And about the people that are considered religious he says that they don't know God or have any idea of what God is, which means they're pagans. And then he's going to teach a different way of praying, which will be very revolutionary.”

I said also that, according to Saint Augustine, Christ didn't want to teach the Our Father as a formula that would be learned by heart. And proof of this is that in Matthew and in Luke the words are different, and if he had

wanted to teach them a formula we would have to say that they didn't learn it very well.

We went on to comment on the first words:

Our Father who are in heaven.

Some further clarifications were necessary. I said that Jesus really didn't use the word “Father” but “Papa.” Mark tells us what Jesus said in Aramaic (his mother tongue) in the prayer in the garden: *Abba*, which is “papa,” and that was probably the word he always used in speaking of God. “Who are in heaven” is a Jewish way of meaning God. Out of respect they often didn't say the word “God” but the word “heaven,” and so Matthew calls the kingdom of God the kingdom of heaven. Here the translation is rather: “Our heavenly papa,” and what it means is “Our papa, God.”

OLIVIA: “It's a loving name that's given to God. And from the very beginning we don't have to be formal when we chat with him and we give him the name of papa. So then to pray isn't to recite prayers but to chat with him.”

TERESITA: “If we call him papa, there's no fear. We're on close terms with him.”

WILLIAM: “That business of calling the kingdom of God the kingdom of heaven has led to a lot of confusion. Because people have believed that the kingdom will be in heaven, in the next life, but Christ was talking of a kingdom here on earth. And also to say ‘who are in heaven’ has created an awful confusion in our minds too. Because we imagine the Father as someone way up there where the astronauts are, instead of somebody who is inside you and in our other brothers.”

JULIO: “And if the Jews out of respect for God didn't say the name of God and Christ himself doesn't want to mention it either, wouldn't it be good for us too not to be using the word ‘God’? Because Christians are always saying God, God, God, and that's like a blasphemy because they're thinking of a dictator. But there are others that maybe are atheists but they love their brothers and I believe that they're showing respect for God.”

And REBECA, his mother: “But Jesus teaches us to call him ‘papa’ so we won't feel he's far away. And he doesn't say ‘My Father’ or ‘My papa’ but ‘our,’ because he's the Father of us all. We're all his children, not only Christ but all of us. And therefore we're all brothers.”

NATALIA: “Brothers. When we talk to God like that we're declaring that we're all equal. And we have to love each other like the children of the same papa. And if somebody thinks there should be exploiters, he can't pray that way.”

MARCELINO, Rebeca's husband: “The Our Father is a community prayer, of all of us, and we're supposed to pray in community. And what we ask for is for everybody.”

Holy be your name.

I explained that for the Jews “God” was the same as saying holiness or justice. And holiness was the sign of God among us. “Name” for them was the same as saying “person,” or also, as we now say, “personality.” This petition “holy be your name,” might better be translated as: “May your person be made known.” Or: “May you be acknowledged (doing justice).”

FELIPE PEÑA: “To make something holy then doesn't mean to chant, to say prayers, to have processions, to read the Bible. Making the name of God holy means to love others, to do something for others. If we set to glorifying God just with prayers and processions as we used to, we're not making God holy at all. In other words to make love real is to make the name of God holy or to make his person known here on earth, even though maybe the name of God won't even be mentioned.”

ALEJANDRO: “God's justice is the same as his holiness and to make justice real means to make holy. But by justice we can't mean bourgeois justice. Justice is the same as liberation, to put an end to all exploitation, and that means to make God known, to reveal him among ourselves.”

May your kingdom come.

LAUREANO: “This kingdom that we hope for will come when there's equality, when there's brotherhood. We here *do* want the kingdom to come. We're building it.”

TOMAS: “If we ask for it to come it means it hasn't come. And if we ask for it to come it means it has to come. And if it has to *come* it's not heaven or the next life. We don't ask for that to come, we ask to go there. So this must be a thing that has to come to the earth and that hasn't come yet. That's the way it seems to me, though I don't know much about it.”

LAUREANO: “If we ask for it we're obliged to do everything we can to make this kingdom come. And they have no right to talk, people who are against this kingdom or who aren't interested in it or who aren't doing anything to build it. Because it's a kingdom that's made among people and with people. I mean it comes from God but it can't be made without us.”

ROSITA: “It's love.”

ELVIS: “And this is a prayer, then, that forces us to act, like Laureano said.”

I added that this petition is really the same as the first one.

And we went on to the following one:

May your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

OLIVIA: “In heaven they live a life of love, there's no selfishness there. And there aren't any injustices or oppressions either. Here we live in a very different way. In this prayer we're asking to live here like they live there. We have a long way to go before we see that kingdom built here. Here some people are starving to death and others waste food. Some sick people have no way to get cured and others have more medical attention than they need. Some people have too many clothes and others don't have a single change. So that means that it will take a lot of work to see this kingdom come. It will take…”

“May what's done in heaven be done on earth is like saying let heaven be made on earth,” said TERESITA.

“The will of God is love,” said one of the Guevara girls.

And I said that we see then that this is the same petition as the others too: Let God's love be revealed among people, let his kingdom come, which is the kingdom of love, let God's will be done, which is love…

FELIPE: “May your will be done also means may your teachings be fulfilled. That is, may justice be done. The creation of a just system, of equality and companionship, and not of exploitation. In other words, may the word of God be fulfilled. This is the same petition as for bread: that we all have enough.”

MANUEL ALVARADO: “Bread and all the things that Doña Olivia was talking about: clothes, medicines, and all the other things that we need. It seems to me that the word ‘bread’ means all that.”

Give us today the bread that we need.

JULIO MAIRENA: “And wouldn't Christ consider everything like a single day? Because he says give us the bread *today*, for this day. Could it be that all days are for him a single day?”

JULIO was asked to make himself clearer, and he said: “Not the way we say ‘tomorrow’ or ‘the day after tomorrow’ but that for him everything is a single day. Because if we're going to be asking today for now, and tomorrow for tomorrow…. I think he meant to say for all time.”

LAUREANO, his cousin: “But are you going to be asking for a whole mess of it just to store it up, you ass?”

JULIO, laughing: “Because it'll go bad, won't it?”

OLIVIA: “Be careful. It seems to me that if God gave me a whole lot of things, I'd think I'd never need anything again. And so I wouldn't think about God anymore, because I'm stuffed. I wouldn't remember other people or care about anybody else. You ask him every day because you ask him like you ask your papa, like the little boy that asks every day. And you ask him for enough. Not as if we lived just on bananas.”

JULIO: “As I see it we have just one job to do. To change society and to have bread that day: for all time. For every day. Once and for all. That's what I find. If we're always going to be begging for a little bit of bread, today for today, and tomorrow and the day after tomorrow…that way we'd always be in need. No: we'll just do the job once and afterwards we'll always have enough to eat and enough to wear and all the rest. That's what I meant when I said that Jesus wasn't really talking about a single day…”

RAFAEL: “I think what Julio says is quite right. Let it be forever, right? But it's also clear that it's not a question of storing it up, as Laureano says, but we have to ask just for what we need and not what somebody else might need for today, you see?”

And REBECA, the mother of Oscar and Julio: “As I see it, God gives bread every day. He gives every day for everybody. But at times the strongest one is the one that hoards and the one who can't, well, he's left hungry. God gives bread every day so we can all eat, so nobody will be left hungry.”

MARCELINO: “We ask for *our* bread and not my bread, like we used to call God our papa and not my papa. To ask for our bread is to ask for it for everybody and for nobody to be left hungry either today or tomorrow.”

I said: “That's the same petition as the earlier ones: Let the kingdom of love come and the day when there's an abundance of bread for everybody.”

NATALIA: “Yes, enough for everybody. When nobody has too much and nobody dies of hunger, that's the kingdom.”

JULIO said, laughing: “Then let's go ask for it from those who have it hoarded up. Let's ask for it from those who have too much. Our duty is to take it away from them, because they have what's not their share. They have extra and it belongs to the people who are in need.”

I: “We might say then that here we're asking for change to occur. The day when we can distribute to everybody, according to their needs, the things that are now monopolized. And we see that it's not only up to us to beg for this change but to bring it about.”

REBECA: “It's liberation, so we'll all be equal, and there won't be no poor and there won't be no rich.”

“The kingdom of God,” added someone.

And REBECA: “The kingdom of God, which is liberation.”

FELIPE: “This means the will of God has been done.”

OSCAR: “I also understand, Ernesto, that when we ask him for bread and the other things we need, we have to fight to get them, as we've said, not only for ourselves but for the others. But until the time we can get them, we have to put up with things, because that also may be the will of God for the moment.”

“No!” interrupted LAUREANO. “That's being a conformist.”

And Oscar's mother: “That's going along with exploitation.”

OSCAR continued: “Let me explain: It's not to accept exploitation but to accept the will of God. I see it this way, look, if we as a group are opposed to injustice and if we're struggling and we can't get what we want, if we can't bring about the change for the time being, well, let his will be done. But we don't lie down! We have to keep moving ahead.”

I told Oscar that we do have to accept the defeat that's beyond our control. We must not rebel against what's unavoidable but only against what's avoidable. And sometimes good can come out of defeat. And in that sense failure can be the will of God. We have to remember that this was Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Olives, when he faced his own failure, the same prayer that he had taught his disciples. According to Mark his prayer went: “*Abba* (Papa), may your will be done.”

OLIVIA: “His will, after all, must be for us to live. His will must be for us to have happiness, not disasters. So we should be able to accept our own suffering, and even be happy with it.”

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

OLIVIA: “There's where we have to have that acceptance Oscar speaks of, because if anyone offends us it's out of ignorance. And if that guy offended me that's no reason to offend him.”

I: “We shouldn't have hatred or bitterness or any negative feeling, right?”

REBECA: “I believe we have to beg God's forgiveness for our sins, which are selfishness. It wouldn't do us any good to be begging his pardon if we kept on being selfish. We have to change our attitude if he's going to hear us. And that's why we ask him to forgive us and say that we forgive.”

WILLIAM: “Because we saw that the kingdom of God was the kingdom of love. As long as there's selfishness this kingdom won't come. And there won't be bread for everybody as long as there's selfishness, fights among us, and we don't love each other. And it wouldn't do any good for all of us to have food and clothing and all we need if there's bitterness and hatred among us. Right? So there has to be love among us all.”

OSCAR: “If there isn't, there won't be any kingdom either.”

FELIPE: “And the will of God won't be fulfilled, which is what's happening now.”

COSME CANALES: “We say we forgive those who are in debt to us; that can mean any offense. But it can also mean money debts. I don't say we shouldn't ask for payment of a debt if the guy can pay, but if he can't, we ought to forgive him. For a lot of rich people it's easier to forgive an offense, any offense, than to forgive a debt.”

ROSITA: “Did you ever see a rich person forgive a debt?”

COSME continued: “And so a rich person can't say this prayer if he isn't ready to forgive not just offenses but debts, too.”

CHAEL: “We know of course that this prayer is not for the rich. The Our Father is only for the poor, for those who have no bread.”

I said that, in the new liturgical reforms, the old translation “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors” was changed to “Forgive us our offenses as we forgive those who offend us.” But the first translation was the correct one, for Matthew used a Greek word that means exactly a

money debt, the same word that he must have used a lot in his job as a publican, or tax collector.

And do not put us to the test but free us from evil.

JULIO RAMON: “By ‘do not put us to the test’ I understand that he means not to put us in competition. Who with? It must be with the devil, I think.”

ADAN ORTEGA: “The test now, I believe, is exploitation, capitalism.”

And the other JULIO: “I think that we who are talking here talk a lot about change. Maybe we'll be put to the test some day, if we're lucky enough to have enough power. It's a test that could be very hard.”

TOMASITO (who says very little): “Free us from evil means free us from injustice. Something like that, I think…”

FELIPE: “And in other words free us from evil is free us from selfishness. It's the greatest evil that can exist among us, selfishness. Anybody who controls other people, it's because he's selfish. Anybody who steals is selfish. That's why we have to ask God to free us from selfishness. That's the evil. Now, love is the opposite of evil. Evil is defeated by love. That's the only thing stronger than evil, love.”

JULIO MAIRENA: “Jesus said that we don't need to pray with a lot of words because God knows what we need. Then we don't need to pray with just a few words, either, because he already knows. I think the formal prayers that are chanted in church are pagan prayers. I bet you God doesn't want us to pray to him but to act instead.”

I said that Christ didn't tell us not to pray, but just not to pray asking for a lot of things like the pagans, because the Father knows what we need. He used to pray, and Luke tells us he taught this prayer because the disciples, who had watched him praying, asked him to teach them to pray. And what do you suppose his prayer was? I'm sure it must have been this one, because it's the one he taught.

LAUREANO: “It seems to me that the few little words that he taught, these words, take in almost everything. And that's why he tells us not to pray with a lot of words, blah-blah-blah like the pagans. There's no reason to be asking for pants, shirts, shoes, because it's all included in this prayer for change.”

REBECA: “We ask for love to rule. That way all evil comes to an end.”

I said that we see that all these petitions are really a single prayer, the prayer of liberation: for his name to be revealed, which is this liberation (which is also the name of Jesus); for his kingdom of love to come; for his will to be done, which is love; for there to be bread for all; for him to forgive us in our forgiveness of others, since we've offended him in others, and among ourselves for nobody to owe anything to anyone else; and finally for him to free us from all injustice.

NATALIA: “A kingdom of brotherhood, with justice, with bread, with forgiveness, with love. This covers everything.”

JULIO: “And so isn't to say a lot of Our Fathers to pray like pagans?”

WILLIAM said: “We pray to God for his name to be holy, and it's up to us to make his name holy. We pray for his kingdom to come, and it's up to us to build it. We pray that his will be done on earth, and it's up to us to do his will. We pray to him for bread, and it's up to us to make it and share it. We pray to him for forgiveness, and it's up to us to forgive. We pray not to fall into evil and it's up to us to escape from it. That's what's interesting about this prayer. I think that a lot of people maybe don't say the Our Father, like Che didn't say it, but in their hearts they're asking for all this.”

I said that this is the prayer we should have. That it's the one that Christ said on earth, and the one that, according to Saint Paul, he goes on saying in our hearts. I ended by reading what the Letter to the Galatians (4:6) says: “As we are his sons, God sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying: ‘*Abba*, Papa!’”

22.

“Look at the Lilies in the Field…”

(Matthew 6:24–34)

We were gathered in our little church with the dirt floor. With us were the poets Jose Coronel Urtecho and Pablo Antonio Cuadra, who had come to spend a few days with us. And also our friend Samuel (a painter who had recently been changing into a financier) and a South American friend of his who is a Vice President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in New York had come in a small plane from Managua to spend a few hours with us. The Gospel passage that we were to comment on that Sunday was that of the lilies in the field.

> *No one can serve two masters, because he will hate one and love the other, or he will be faithful to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money*.

REBECA: “Because money makes you selfish, hardens you, keeps you from loving.”

Young GLORIA: “Money isolates people. It separates them from others. I mean the love of money.”

And JOSE ESPINOSA, a middle-aged *campesino:* “Love for money makes you proud. You want to excel over others, to be more than the other fellow, and that's why people get split up into classes.”

I asked: “Then according to this verse you can't be a Christian and be rich?”

Young LAUREANO, who always gave very radical answers: “He's condemning the rich completely.”

Old TOMAS, slowly: “It seems to me that he wasn't. If he said that, he meant you can't belong to two classes.”

DON CHON: “It seems to me that he's condemning them. Yes, because we can't give. What we have is scarcely enough for ourselves, and if maybe we do give it's a little thing. We can't give much because we don't have much. Yet they get all the breaks because they're the ones who have it.”

And FELIX, who when the rich are attacked often comes to their defense (although he's as poor as the rest): “He said ‘serve,’ he didn't say ‘be rich.’ There are rich people who aren't servants of money but use it to do good for others, although there aren't many rich people like that.”

COSME CANALES, the boatman: “They aren't rich any more. They were rich and now they're poor, because they used their money to serve their neighbor.”

OLIVIA: “The rich can be saved when they stop being rich.”

OSCAR: “I say this, see. If he uses money to help, he can be a Christian. But if he has it only to go on hoarding it, no. Because money is also useful if I, as a rich man, distribute it to the people. Even though money by itself is worth nothing. In God's eyes money is worth nothing, hoarded in the form of capital, but money is valuable to God when it's used for something good.”

I: “Really the Gospel is talking about serving money…”

And OSCAR went on: “Well, it seems to me that serving money, as Jesus says there, is to be keeping it and increasing it, making the capital bigger.”

LAUREANO: “That's what the rich do. There's no rich person that gives his money away, because then he'll be poor.”

GLORIA: “Well, the best thing is to have no rich people.”

EDUARDO (to Oscar): “That's what you say right now, but if you had money you'd want more and when you had more you'd want even more.”

OSCAR: “I think there are some people with money who are good, open-hearted people. Those are Christians. There are others who give only what they can't use and that's not being a Christian.”

MARIITA: “I think you can't be a Christian if you're ruled by love of money, but you *can* be a Christian when you've given it away. That means you can't serve two bosses at the same time. Any millionaire can be a Christian, but only when he's given his money away to the poor.”

WILLIAM: “To serve means to love, and what Christ is saying is that you can't love God and love money. Because God is love and love of money is

selfishness.”

FELIX: “Then Jesus doesn't condemn just the rich but everyone who is greedy for money even though he's very poor.”

“Of course.”

“And the day when there's no rich people and there's no poor people greedy for money, then all of us are going to be able to serve God,” said DOÑA ANGELA.

I said that the word that Christ used here to refer to money is the Aramaic word *Mammon*, which is the name of the God of wealth, an idol, and he was making us see that the love of money is idolatry.

The poet PABLO ANTONIO said: “The Greeks also deified money with the name of Pluto. I believe that cult has existed since money was invented. But now the god of money is more of a god than ever.”

And the poet CORONEL: “And the banks are his temples.” And he said, turning to the Vice President of the IDB: “I've always been struck by bank architecture, which is so like that of temples…”

The VICE PRESIDENT: “And shouldn't we also understand the words of Christ in the context of the economy of the times, which was a slave system? That must be why he talks of two masters…”

CORONEL: “But as long as we are under the control of money we are part of a system of slavery, although the relations between masters and slaves are given another name today. Slavery is now in its capitalistic phase, but the slavery is more gigantic. I imagine the money that goes from hand to hand to be like a long, long chain that links everybody's neck together and winds up on Wall Street, which is where all the money ends, as you know. The *pesos* that you have in your wallet (fortunately I don't have any at the moment) don't belong to you. They belong to Wall Street. You can believe you've earned them and that they belong to you, but they'll go from hand to hand until they get to Wall Street. As these revolutionary faithful have made clear to us here, to serve money is to serve slavery, while to serve the opposing master is to be free.”

And OSCAR said: “It's obvious that if you have capital you don't have love.”

And WILLIAM said: “You can't have love and selfishness at the same time. That's why love and money are incompatible.”

And FELIPE: “And it's clear that if you want to serve others, you don't want money. And if it's money that interests you, you don't want to serve

others. That's why he says that if you love one you despise the other. In other words love of neighbor is incompatible with love of money."

> *I say to you then: Do not worry about what you are going to eat or drink to stay alive, nor about the clothes that you are going to wear. Isn't life worth more than food, and the body worth more than clothes? Look at the birds in the sky, that do not sow or reap or have granaries; yet your Father in heaven feeds them. How much more valuable you are than the birds! And which of you, no matter how much you worry about it, can make yourself a half-yard taller?*

ADAN: "He says we should look at the birds. One thing we can learn from them is that they don't exploit each other. Among them there are no rich and no poor. They have no social classes."

JULIO MAIRENA: "And another thing we must learn from them is not to be weighed down by the future. God wants us to live free and easy like the birds. They don't have any harvests and they are free, so we should be much freer with the harvests and all the other things that we produce. They are animals and are not weighed down, so we who are the children of God should be weighed down even less."

Through the door and the two windows on one side of the church we can see the lake to the north, and through the door and the other two windows on the other side we can also see the lake on the south side. And through the open front, still unfinished, we see a green field filled with trees. I said that Christ invites us to look at this nature that surrounds us on all sides that we can see is all brimming with food: fish in the water, herons on the shore, iguanas in the trees, sparrows, flowers, grass, all beings find more than enough food, which serves as abundant food to other beings. For many, these are the blind forces of nature. Christ wants us to know that there is a great love that watches over us.

A lady who has come from the opposite shore (from the Valley of Guadalupe) said: "Well, as the mother of nine children I've always lived with that trust, and we've never had any money but we've never lacked what is necessary. Something always turns up. I'd never heard this Gospel, but it seems to me it's almost our lives."

REBECA: "God always works miracles."

DOÑA CHICA: "This Gospel is for people in trouble, poor people."

FELIPE: “I'm worried about one thing. Won't this Gospel alienate the poor even more? Because you can go up to a poor woman, one of those mothers who sell things in the market, for example, and say to her, ‘Don't you worry, ma'am. Maybe tomorrow your onions will bring a better price, have faith…’”

GUSTAVO: “But Felipe, I want to ask you something. For example, you go to that lady and you tell her, ‘Come with your husband and we're going to go to work to change this system.’ And she says to you, ‘No, no, because I have some onions that I have grown.’ Are you going to say, ‘Is your harvest more important than solving all the world's problems?’ Of course you won't. You'll say, ‘Don't worry about that, we'll find a way to settle things, and let's fight to change things.’ Right?”

FELIPE: “Yes, of course.”

ALEJANDRO: “I don't know, I believe in miracles and all that, but when the Gospel asks us not to worry, I see clearly that it's talking about a social change. That is, it's not a question just of waiting around for miracles. The thief often steals because his family has nothing to eat, and he lives with that worry. And the rich person worries about making more money. I believe we can have a social system in which we don't have that worry, that anguish that I'm going to lose my job or have less money than the other fellow or that I'll get sick or what am I going to do when I'm old. But not in this other system, because you have all you need and nobody's going to take it away from you and you can devote yourself to working in peace, to studying and all that, without that desperation.”

GUSTAVO: “But I believe that on the road to that system, which can be a very long road, it's more necessary than ever to have that lack of concern. Because when you work for other people you maybe won't have any support. You're going to be up in the air, and if you don't have that confidence that Jesus talks about, you won't dare take a step. You'll just stick to your personal interests, to your selfish concerns. That's what happens to middle-class people. Middle-class worries are always stupid, because they are unreal like that example that Jesus gives of wanting to be a half-yard taller; and besides being unreal they are useless, because what good does it do you to be taller than the others?”

And why do you worry about clothes? Look at how the flowers grow in the fields; they do not work or spin, and nevertheless I say to you

that not even King Solomon with all his luxury was dressed like one of them. And if God dresses the wild grass this way, grass that today is in the field and tomorrow is burned in the oven, how much more will he do for you men of little faith!

One of the young men said: “You ought to dress any way you want. You shouldn't go around worrying about clothes. It seems to me that's what Christ means.”

And another, LAUREANO, said: “But if you don't dress nice the girls don't like you.”

There were titters and laughter among the girls. Afterwards GLORIA said: “It's clear that Jesus here had no admiration for kings or for riches. Because Solomon must have dressed with great luxury and Jesus preferred a little wild flower over all that luxury.”

And ALEJANDRO: “When the new social system comes we'll all be dressed better than King Solomon. Because we don't like those luxurious clothes, we don't think that is dressing well.”

OLIVIA: “The grass is very pretty but it soon passes, while human beings are destined for eternal life. And therefore all these material things are very important, even clothes, as Laureano says. But to be concerned only about yourself is to have little faith, not to believe in the kingdom of God. Christ doesn't tell us not to spin, not to harvest,…but not to do it only for our own sakes, looking out only for our own food, our own clothing, instead of working for others.”

JULIO: “Look at the flowers, look at the birds, Jesus tells us. Because we can have many wrong ideas because we don't notice the material world.”

Therefore do not worry saying: ‘What are we going to eat?” or “What are we going to drink?” or “What are we going to clothe ourselves with?” Because the pagans toil for all these things; but you have a heavenly Father who knows that you need all that.

I said: “We must remember that the pagans that Christ talks about were very religious, and their religiosity was precisely to ask for rain, fertility, good harvests. Just like there is among us a popular religiosity very similar to that. And it seems to me that Christ is saying that we do not need a

religion to ask for those things because the Father already knows that we need them."

WILLIAM: "And there is another part of the Gospel where Christ says that God makes it rain upon good people and bad people. Even more we can say that he makes it rain on people who pray and on people who don't pray. But there is a love that rules the universe, and it's important to know that."

MARCELINO: "It doesn't mean don't work, but don't worry about it. The plant works sucking the juice from the earth, it doesn't sleep. We should follow the example of the flower in the field, that works, and of the corn that works. The corn that we sow doesn't say, 'All right, now I'm not going to grow and I'm not going to do anything.'"

FRANCISCO: "There's a lot of selfishness among the poor. I think we're poor because we are selfish."

JOSE ESPINOSA: "No, those who exploit us are the selfish ones. Even though we work we're poor. I sowed a rice field and it came up fine and the price is awful. The businessmen set the price of what we sell in San Carlos. And also of what we buy."

PABLO ANTONIO: "And those fellows have their prices set by others, and that's the chain."

MANUEL: "We sowed two acres of rice and we got only one acre out of it, and it's not because we didn't work hard, because we did. You work, but it does you no good."

FELIX: "You have to accept the will of God. Rice gives us very little. It's the will of God that we have little. They pay us badly in San Carlos. It's the will of God that we stay poor."

JOSE ESPINOSA: "No, the will of God is that we fight, and he's going to fight at our side."

MARCELINO: "And that's why we must seek the kingdom of God and his justice."

The IDB man said: "I am a vice president of a foreign bank with a lot of money, and I have listened to all this dialogue with great interest. What do you think that bank ought to do with its money, according to this Gospel?"

MARCELINO: "It's very clear: Give it out."

The IDB man: "Give it out? That's very easy. But then there won't be any money to lend to people in need."

MARCELINO: "You have to give the money out, but you can't take it back again. Because those who have the money can give it away, but since they

are very powerful, they can take it back. And they take back more than they've given away, and the poor are then left poorer than before. But if they give it away and don't take it back then there won't be any more poor people.”

The poet PABLO ANTONIO said: “Let's make no mistake. It's Christ who is talking with the voice of the *campesino*s of Solentiname. To be sure it is a very *campesino* passage, this one about the lilies in the field. I imagine that Christ must surely have spoken in the middle of a field, as we are here, and maybe with that lake of his opposite him, like this one. And he was talking for *campesino*s with economic problems very similar to those of these people in Solentiname. He was a *campesino*, too. We feel in this passage that he is talking with the simplicity and the poetry of the *campesino*s of Galilee. Now he is talking with the poetry of the *campesino*s of Solentiname.”

And our friend SAMUEL, who had come with his banker friend: “These words of Christ are very poetic but they can inspire very reactionary attitudes in us. Because in our environment to eliminate economic concerns means to eliminate progress. Would we return to the economy of primitive people? They were perhaps happy, but economic concerns, competition, ambition rightly understood (I call it initiative instead) have all been necessary for progress.”

MARCELINO: “Initiative, good, to give to others, not to hoard for ourselves. And ambition to see that we all have enough and that nobody needs anything. And competition that I give to you and you give to me. For example: I give food and you give me clothes or shoes, and so neither of us has to worry about what we'll eat or what we'll wear.”

CORONEL (to Samuel): “You are defending a modern system, which in the face of another more modern one turns out to be reactionary. The economic systems of the Gospels and of Marxism are both more modern than capitalism. It's a question of going back to the happiness of primitive people without the handicaps they would have as primitives. Besides, primitive people have been slandered a lot. Let's not forget the Altamira paintings. And right here we have the primitive painting of Solentiname that you admired this morning. Even so, in these poor and primitive conditions of Solentiname we can glimpse a new person.”

SAMUEL: “I am not opposed to this Gospel. I've said that it's very fine. But I also see that, inspired by these fine words, we could ruin the

economy…”

“The capitalist economy,” said PABLO ANTONIO.

And CORONEL: “These very fine words would produce a very fine economy.”

PABLO ANTONIO, smiling, to Samuel and his friend from the IDB: “The banks would be ruined.”

CORONEL: “And the banks, as you know just as well as we do, are a great big shit.”

So then, seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all the rest shall be given to you in addition.

OSCAR: “I believe that the kingdom of God is unity, like we have here. And the happiness of being here. What more do we want? I feel very happy being here with everyone. For me that is the kingdom.”

MARCELINO: “The kingdom of God is love. And justice, it's the same. Let's try to bring about this society of love and justice, and then there will be no more exploitation. And therefore there will be abundance for everybody. We'll all have not only food and clothing but also schools, clinics, hospitals, adequate housing, all we need.”

MANUEL: “I'd like to give an example. In the country you could open a wonderful school, and not a single child comes. Why not? Because they have to work with their parents, and they have to take care of their homes and the little children. On the other hand if there's social justice, the schools will be put up almost all by themselves, and the children then would really be free to study. That is, all the rest shall be given in addition.”

FELIPE: “God gives things to people like he gives them to the birds. And more than to the birds. He gives us the earth and all that we take out of the earth to eat and to clothe ourselves and to live in comfort. But people take things away from each other. Then some have and others don't. That's why, if we seek the kingdom of brotherhood and justice, we're going to have all the things that God gives.”

GUSTAVO: “We'd already have reached the kingdom of God if it wasn't because most people devote themselves only to looking for their own economic security.”

WILLIAM: “All the rest, comforts, material things, are not important. What's important is love. But that ‘addition’ is also necessary.”

PABLO ANTONIO: “There are some who believe that the problem of social justice is going to be solved after economic development is solved. According to Jesus it's just the opposite.”

I said: “It's often said also in the Church that before society is changed we must seek to change the heart of man. Christ says that first comes the kingdom and its justice, or the kingdom of justice, which is the same thing. He doesn't say that first we must seek religious conversion and all the rest shall be given in addition. Because it is proven that religious conversions do not put an end to a system of exploitation. On the contrary, religion can be used for more exploitation.”

And LAUREANO: “The kingdom of God is justice. That is, our only concern must be justice, which is to bring about the Revolution.”

And CORONEL: “The kingdom of heaven is upon the earth, it's clear, but we can't forget that there's also a heaven, or, as it is called, a something beyond death. If not, our vision is incomplete. We're myopic. The myopic person is someone who can't see far. The dogma of the resurrection of the flesh means that the Revolution does not end in this world, that communism goes on after death.”

We have come to the end. And PABLO ANTONIO says to Coronel, sitting beside him: “Fidel would accept a Mass like this one. And it would have pleased Che.”

23.

Do Not Cast Pearls to the Pigs

(Matthew 7:6–12)

Do not give sacred things to the dogs lest they turn against you and tear you to pieces. And do not cast your pearls to the pigs lest they tread on them.

MANUEL said: “I think one of those sacred things is the Eucharist. There are people who receive sacred things without respecting them. They shouldn't be given to that kind of people.”

JORGE: “And these people can attack you. If you give a hog jewels instead of corn the hog will get furious.”

LAUREANO said: “I still don't get it.”

QUIQUE: “Maybe it refers to people who think all government is sacred. People in authority are given what belongs to God, and they use power against the people.”

LAUREANO (who was saying that he hadn't understood): “Each person is sacred. So it must be that you shouldn't exploit others and live off them.”

DONALD: “I want to say something like what Laureano said. There are people in power who exploit others. The poor people get screwed and get exploited more and more, and they are looked down on as if they were garbage. So the hogs are the rich who are stepping on the pearls who are the workers.”

OSCAR: “Maybe it's talking about the love that Christ came to bring to the earth. That's what's sacred, and also that's what the jewels are. And there are some people who are like dogs or pigs. You can't give them what's sacred, you can't give them the jewels.”

DONALD: “Yes, sure, because if they're stepping on other people they're stepping on love.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that Jesus Christ calls people dogs who interpret the Gospels only to screw their neighbor, only to defend their interests. We can't give them this Gospel because then they'll just make use of it to exploit people.”

QUIQUE: “Saying for example that the kingdom of heaven is going to be in heaven and that it has nothing to do with this world.”

I said: “It seems, then, that according to Jesus the Gospel message must not be given to everyone because it's not for everyone.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that's it. All poor people have to agree with the Gospel because it's meant for their liberation. But this doesn't suit the middle class.”

MANUEL: “But first we have to show them and try to explain to them.”

FELIPE: “How are we going to preach liberation to someone who doesn't want liberation because he's an oppressor? There's no sense in talking to him about that.”

OLIVIA: “It would be better instead for the exploiters not to hear these things. The Gospel is bound to make them furious and Christ knew this, and that's why he tells us to be careful.”

Ask, and God will give to you; seek and you will find; knock at the door and it will open for you.

LAUREANO: “I believe that there he was referring to liberation, and the fulfillment of love among people. That's what we must ask for. And not just ask for. Because he also talks of knocking and seeking.”

MANUEL: “He doesn't mean that we should pray and ask for anything we feel like and God is going to give it to us. Suppose I ask him for things that belong to someone else. He's not going to give them to me!”

Is there perhaps one of you capable of giving a stone to your son when he asks you for bread? Or giving him a snake when he asks you for a fish?

JORGE: “He's talking about good things. He's not referring to money. Because anybody who asks God to give him money is selfish. God won't grant that.”

I said: “That must be like the son asking his father for a snake.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that the good things you can ask for are good ideas, good feelings toward your friends, a capacity for love. We'll always get all that if we ask for it.”

> *So then always do unto others as you want them to do unto you: because this is the commandment of the Law of Moses and the Books of the Prophets*.

FELIPE: “In other words: if we want other people to love us, we have to love them. And this can also mean that our liberation is involved in the liberation of others.”

QUIQUE: “These are the good things Jesus says we should ask for and they will be given to us.”

I said that Jesus was saying something very revolutionary here, and that it could even shock many religious people. By “the Law and the Prophets” Jesus means the whole Bible. And he says that the whole Bible, all it talks about is love for others. Not serving God, not worshiping God, not loving God, but doing unto others what we want them to do unto us. We might almost say that he makes an atheistic interpretation of the Bible.

QUIQUE: “He means that the guy who does that is already obeying what the Bible says, even though he isn't religious, even though he says he doesn't believe in God. There are still a lot of people who think that the Bible, what it deals with is the relations between man and God, and according to Jesus that's not what it's all about. He takes religion away from the Bible and reduces it just to the relations between people.”

I said there was a problem because right in Matthew (Chapter 22), when the Pharisees asked Jesus which was the most important commandment, he said it was to love God, and then he added that the second is very similar: to love your neighbor as yourself. And that these two commandments “are the basis of all the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets.” Here, on the other hand, he doesn't talk of the love of God but only of love of others.

MANUEL: “Man! God is love itself. Why, somebody who loves God loves love itself. He loves his neighbor. It's all the same.”

JORGE: “God is represented by humanity.”

LAUREANO: “The two things say the same: Love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself. To do unto others what you want them to do

unto you is to do good to them, and so that is to love God. It comes down to the same thing…”

MANUEL interrupted: “And to love your neighbor is not merely to love God, it's the only way we have of loving God.”

I said that Saint Paul had also said in the Letter to the Galatians that the whole Law is summed up in this single commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself,” in spite of the fact that Christ had earlier talked of two commandments. And it's because the love of God and the love of your neighbor are really the same, and anyone who loves his neighbor loves God. You can't say the opposite: that anyone who loves God has therefore fulfilled his duty to love his neighbor. Saint John said that somebody who loves only God and does not love his neighbor does not love God.

LAUREANO interrupts: “What the exploiters do is go to Mass and give alms in the church and pray and do all those drooly things with God, but with their neighbor: nothing. They just exploit him.”

QUIQUE: “Those people really have no contact with God. They worship a false God, who does not exist.”

FELIPE: “The one who loves God loves the people. You love God with deeds, not with your mouth.”

I said that if loving God without love of your neighbor isn't loving God, and love of your neighbor without love of God really is the love of God, that means then that what counts is love of your neighbor.

JORGE: “If that's all the Bible says, then the Bible itself isn't what's important so much as loving your neighbor. And that's all we should ask for and look for.”

MANUEL: “Loving your neighbor and being of service to him, because—watch it!—if all it is is love, you haven't done a thing.”

I said: “It's doing for others what we want for ourselves. It's the same as saying loving your neighbor as yourself. Having consideration for others as for yourself, and for the people's cause as for the cause of each one of us. In reality all of us are a single organism, and all together we are a single I. That's why each one of us must love the others as a part of our own person (that means, “as oneself”). If we don't, we don't belong to the complete Man, we are cut off from humanity.”

GLORIA: “And those who are cut off are like dogs and pigs. They are no longer people. And you can't say these truths to them because they don't understand them and they attack us.”

24.

Jesus Announces the Persecutions

(Matthew 10:16–25)

Look! I am sending you like sheep in the midst of wolves.

First OLIVIA spoke: “It seems to me that Jesus says this because the person who goes to preach his message goes with love, and preaches it in the midst of hatred. That's why they are like sheep among wolves. And people who don't accept the message can kill them.”

TOMAS PEÑA said: “I just want to say that I agree with what she said.”

TERESITA: “There's a huge difference between people who belong to Jesus and people who don't, like the difference there is between love and hate.”

And I: “The word ‘wolf’ we now use to talk about the exploitation of some people by others. It is man who becomes the devourer of his brother. So there is an enormous difference between some people and others, as if they were two very different species, the wolves and the lambs, when we are really all one species.”

OSCAR: “And that species should be like lambs. Let's be as united and as peaceful as the lambs, I say.”

Be, then, as sharp as serpents but as harmless as doves.

LAUREANO: “At the same time he's telling us that we must be aggressive and peaceful. I understand it this way: When you have to use violence, use it, and when you can do things peacefully, do them peacefully. It's only a matter of tactics, I say.”

ALEJANDRO: “There's a difference between being good and being a sap. Just because you're good you don't have to be an idiot, and Jesus is telling us here to be good without being idiotic—not letting anybody get ahead of you. Be sharp, sure! Watch out for the people's interests, and don't let anyone exploit them—that's to be as sharp as a serpent. And you can combine this with the methods of non-violence.”

WILLIAM: “We must have the sharpness of the serpent without its evil, without its poison. That is, we must have the cunning of the enemy without his evil. In that way we must distinguish ourselves from him. Our goodness must be like the goodness of the doves.”

> *Beware, because people will deliver you to the authorities and they will beat upon you in the temples, and they will even take you before governors and kings for my cause*.

Someone else said: “And this is what we're seeing right now. Somebody in Nicaragua preaches Jesus’ message without changing a word and he gets persecuted at once and can be jailed and they can even kill him.”

And another one added: “He says they will be arrested for his cause. That cause is to struggle for social change, for everything he taught, even if you don't mention the name of Jesus. Because other people are always mentioning Jesus’ name but they don't fight for his cause, and not a damn thing happens to them.”

And another: “Of course, here he's talking about governments and he means that we're going to be accused of political crimes, of getting mixed up in politics, of being subversives, of being agitators. Because we don't go around shouting: ‘Jesus loves us.’”

> *But when you are handed over to the authorities, do not worry about what you are going to say or how you are going to say it; because when the moment comes to speak, God will make the words come to you. Because it will not be you that speak but the Spirit of your Father that will speak in you*.

One of the young people: “Usually when a person is accused for a just cause he's a very responsible person and the people that accuse him are usually very stupid. They're always stupid, always, because the tyrannical authorities, like the ones we have in Nicaragua, have to be like that. So you

can always talk to them. With words you can crush them. So you don't even need to think of what you're going to say. The Spirit speaks through you, the conviction that you have, the faith in what you're doing. That's what it means."

Old TOMAS PEÑA: "The person who knows the truth, the Christian, bothers the one who doesn't know and therefore the one who doesn't know the truth can even kill him…"

LAUREANO: "We have an example. When he was tried after the Moncada Barracks attack, Fidel gave a speech that left them flabbergasted. They couldn't even answer him. He accused them…" Another: "That's what always happens when injustice persecutes justice."

> *Men will betray their own brothers to be put to death and fathers will betray their children; children will turn against their parents and will have them killed*.

TOMAS PEÑA: "We have to understand this. Because it's all explained here. Understand it and not do it. Not fall into the error of being the persecutors, but be Christians, that is, the persecuted."

And young ALEJANDRO: "We have to see this in practice. Let's not stay on the theory level. Let's see which are the times this happens in Solentiname, this split because of the Gospels. Let's not name names, but there are a lot of young people who have problems with their parents because of this, or with their older brothers and sisters, even with brothers and sisters who are almost their own age, with friends—friends that used to be friends and that now drop you to speak against you. And all this division is because you're on the side of the Gospels and the others aren't. The others are on the side of the system."

Old TOMAS: "It's true, even in the same family. Maybe there are only three of us and one follows the Gospels and the other two don't, and the one can't persuade the other two and there's the split."

ALEJANDRO again: "We could point out cases, because we've seen them. We've had those cases."

His mother, OLIVIA: "And the same thing happens in the cities. And there are young people, boys and girls who have come here and because they've come here have had to break with their own families. Some maybe have been thrown out of their homes because they came to Solentiname, and

maybe afterwards they'll never go back home. Egda was a girl who had problems at home because she came here and because she followed the Gospels."

> *Everyone will hate you for my cause; but the one who remains steady until the end that one will be saved*.

ALEJANDRO: "And this really happens right now, too. There are people who shouldn't hate people who follow the Gospel. Because this Gospel is in their favor. But what happens is that these people have also been influenced by the propaganda of those on top, and they've persuaded them to be against their own interests, against their own class. And when a prophet, a redeemer, goes to them, they shoot at him. You can understand why the capitalists do that, because the Gospels are against capitalists. But a lot of times the poor people themselves join the capitalists in opposing liberation."

TOMAS: "A lot of times, just for a few pennies offered by the powerful, the poor support the powerful."

PANCHO: "Anyone who defends the Gospels has everyone against him, rich and poor."

OSCAR: "And you can notice this right here on these Solentiname Islands, even though there are so few of us. Even us poor people criticize people who are trying to do us good. We criticize people who are fighting to free us from the exploitation that we all suffer."

Another one added: "The same thing happens with the spies, who are often poor people, and out of innocence, out of dumbness, they're helping the exploitation. They're going against their own interests, against their own brothers and sisters."

> *When they persecute you in one town, flee to another; for in truth I tell you that the Son of Man is going to come before you have travelled through all the towns of Israel*.

I said that this was a very mysterious passage, that I myself was not very clear about it, and that we ought to meditate in order to try to discover its meaning.

There was a long silence. Afterwards ELVIS spoke: "It seems that when he comes all the towns won't be liberated yet. Isn't that what he's saying?"

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that anyone who is preaching the Gospel has a right to protect his life, and if they're persecuting him in one town he ought to go to another town, instead of dying there without liberating anything. If you don't succeed in one place, go to another. He says that they won't cover all the places before he comes, because liberation is very slow, because it's so hard to struggle with the masses, and then you move ahead so little. And if the best leaders are often killed, as always happens, then you have to retreat. And his coming is bound to happen anyway…”

TOMAS: “And we won't have finished travelling to all the places. We'll be left who knows where…”

Someone: “That's all very good, it's all very clear…”

ALEJANDRO: “It may be clear, but it's not good.”

Another one said: “It means that the struggle will be a long one and that all the towns won't be liberated before he comes. But when he does come everything will be solved.”

> *No disciple is greater than his teacher, and no servant is greater than his master. The disciple must try to become like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the lord of the house is called Beelzebub, what will they call the members of his family?*

I said that Beelzebub, one of the names that they gave to the devil, meant “lord of the house,” and that Jesus, when he says that he, the lord of the house, is called Beelzebub, is making a pun. This is a sample of Jesus’ humor. Even though he's talking of persecutions, he makes a joke. The Jews made a play on words between this word and another that sounds a lot like it which meant: “Lord of shit.”

Another one: “Sometimes the disciple is greater than the teacher, when instead of calling him Beelzebub they call him Your Excellency…”

And another: “If the disciple can't be greater than the teacher, we also should expect all kinds of attacks without being demoralized.”

TOMAS: “We have to bear up.”

25.

Which One to Fear

(Matthew 10:26–31)

Therefore do not fear the people. For there is no secret that will not be discovered, and nothing hidden that will not be revealed. What I tell you in darkness, say it by the light of day; and what I tell you in secret shout it from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear the one that can destroy the body and the soul in hell.

TOMAS PEÑA spoke first: “The one you have to fear is the Evil One, because the Evil One is a spirit like God. He was with God and he learned a lot from him. And since he is evil he can do all kinds of evil to us.”

His son FELIPE: “The Evil One is the spirit that controls people, and this evil spirit works through the people who obey him. We ought to be afraid of anyone who works with the evil spirit, which isn't the spirit of love.”

OSCAR: “I also think Jesus is referring here to hypocrisy, because there are times when you do things in secret, when you say: ‘I'm doing this on the sly and screwing the others.’ But it says here that there's nothing hidden that won't be found out.”

LAUREANO: “I believe one thing: Here it tells who we should be afraid of…. I think it's that we shouldn't be afraid of anyone, that we should fight against injustice whenever we can. The way it says here: What I say to you in secret you shout it. More than anything else, it's this, I think: Denounce injustice.”

ALEJANDRO: “One sentence here is very clear: ‘Therefore do not fear the people.’ The fear you have that they're going to do you some harm. And

when are they going to do you harm? When you're against certain systems, certain injustices. That is, we're absolutely forbidden to be afraid of telling the truth, of being against anything that will endanger us, even our lives. It's clear that for the sake of justice we have to risk even our bodies. They can kill the body but they can't kill the cause for which we fight. And it spreads even wider: The Gospel tells us some words here in secret that we're supposed to shout."

Another boy said: "I think like you, Alejandro, that here, the government we have in Nicaragua, it does whatever it wants with us, with the people, and because we're afraid we don't fight against these injustices. According to what it says here we shouldn't be afraid of that, because if they're doing an injustice to the people we should fight. And all right, let's die, the body isn't worth anything and they can destroy our bodies but not our souls. It seems to me then that we ought to fight and not submit."

ARMANDO: "Another important thing that I see it says here: Some may lose their bodies and others may lose their bodies and their souls together. If you support exploitation you lose both, body and soul."

I said it was also interesting to see that Jesus doesn't contrast the soul and the body, in the sense that it doesn't matter to lose your body if you save your immortal soul. For Jesus the saving or the losing is for the body and the soul together, that is, the whole person. And Jesus didn't really use the word 'soul' in the sense in which we use it, because the word didn't exist among the Jews. Instead he used the word 'life.' What he is telling us is that there is a death that does not destroy a person and that we shouldn't fear it. But there is another death that does destroy the whole person.

ALEJANDRO: "As I see it, the Gospel tells us not to be afraid of people. And when it tells us something it's so that we can practice it and speak about it. Now, I'm not clear about that business of the secret. Can the secret be the Gospel…?"

OLIVIA: "I think so, because the words of the Gospels are a mysterious thing, a secret. And this is something that everyone doesn't know. There are only a few that receive this secret. And it's at the bottom of our hearts that we get to hear this secret word of Jesus. But what Jesus told us in private, we have to make public, and it will have an influence even on politics and it will change society."

JULIO MAIRENA said: "This is like when Ernesto announced that he was a socialist. It was a secret that wasn't supposed to be kept a secret but to be

spread around.”

I said that Jesus had to tell his message to a few people and because of the historical conditions of that time, his message could not influence politics. Up till now the Gospels have been followed only individually or in small communities (monasteries and convents), but we see that the time is now coming when it should be made *public*—in political life and in social life. Now the historical conditions allow the change of attitude to be a change in society as a whole.

ARMANDO: “And injustice and exploitation can't be kept hidden all the time. The poor have been deceived. They were made to believe they were poor because of bad luck or because of God's will. Now all the oppressed are beginning to realize that they're being exploited, and maybe that's also why he says that there's nothing hidden that won't get known. And the Revolution must be shouted from the housetops.”

ANTENOR: “He didn't use any propaganda or any kind of broadcasting or even write a book. That's why he says he whispered it. But it was so that we could broadcast it without being afraid.”

> *You can buy two little birds for a penny, can't you? But not one of them falls to earth without your Father allowing it.*

LAUREANO: “I think that here also he's telling us not to be afraid of anything, because just as God takes care of the little birds, they don't fall unless he allows it, so he'll take care of us so that we won't fall. We'll fall when we have to fall or when our fall does some good, and that isn't really a fall.”

MANUEL: “We see clearly the importance that these people have in God's eyes when even the hairs on their head are counted one by one. And we must be conscious of how valuable we are.”

Another one added: “It means each one of us is of tremendous importance to God.”

And OLIVIA: “As I understand it, the Gospel tells us this so we know that we're worth so much, as Manuelito says. Because a person is the loveliest and most beloved creature of God. He takes care of us, and we're so valuable that even when we die we're not dead. We're just living more, and that's why we shouldn't be afraid.”

I said we shouldn't be afraid not because nothing bad is going to happen to us but because nothing can happen to us that isn't the will of God. But this is the same as saying that nothing really bad can happen to us, because God is in control of the whole universe, even the flight of a little bird he has to watch over, and God is love.

ARMANDO: “Even the little birds that are worth hardly anything in the market are worth a lot to God. How much more must people be worth to him, although for the exploiters people aren't worth anything. They buy them very cheap.”

One of the girls: “And that's a lovely comparison with the little birds.”

26.

Jesus a Cause of Division

(Matthew 10:34–37)

Before reading the passage we were going to comment on, OSCAR had seen the title and exclaimed: “I don't understand this! He came to bring unity. Why does it say here that he's a cause of division. He's supposed to be love!”

I said that first we ought to read it. We read this brief passage from Matthew, four verses, and went on to comment on them:

> *Do not believe that I have come to bring peace to earth; for I have come to bring not peace but the sword.*

ANTENOR said: “Injustice had always reigned on earth. He is coming to put an end to that state of affairs. So he's coming to fight. But he's not going to be fighting all alone. He does it with us.”

MARCELINO: “He brought a very sharp weapon, which is his word. He brought that weapon for us. And it's what we're receiving here.”

One said: “Jesus is against being a conformist. That is why he said he didn't come to bring peace.”

Another said: “There are people who want to live in peace, to have no problems…”

And young ARMANDO: “There are two kinds of peace. There's a peace that's simply to accept injustice, to remain quiet while the exploitation goes on. And there's another peace, the one we get after we achieve justice, when things get straightened out.”

LAUREANO: “It seems to me that Jesus is teaching here that just because he was Jesus he wasn't going to change things, bang!, to divide everything up. On the contrary, it's up to us to fight so that we can have peace.”

ARMANDO: “Because you have to fight to reach that peace, right?”

LAUREANO went on: “Yes, you have to fight hard in every country to get justice established throughout the world.”

ALEJANDRO said: “Another thing that I see is that you can't have peace if you really love your neighbor. Even when there's peace in a community, like here in Solentiname, where life is peaceful and happy because we're all at peace, even here, deep down you have the great worry, the uneasiness… because you see injustice more clearly. And the cause of this worry, I think, is love. And you can say, then, that this person is not completely at peace because he is concerned about others. And it would be too bad if we were all calm.”

Another said: “Since Jesus has come to bring a change, that is, a Revolution, he wasn't coming to bring peace but war.”

I: “It's clear that as long as there is a class of oppressors and a class of the oppressed, you can't want to have peace between oppressors and oppressed, because that means to want to have oppression. But if we want the oppressed class to be freed so that there won't any longer be oppressors and oppressed, then we really do not want peace.”

And OSCAR said: “Ah, now I understand. What Jesus brought was unity for some but not for all. For some—those who are on the side of love. He's the cause of division because he's the cause of unity.”

> *I have come to set the man against his father, the daughter against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law: so that each one will have for enemies the members of his own family*.

LAUREANO: “This seems to be against love, but as a matter of fact you shouldn't always be stuck to your family, to your own kind. You should be for everyone, for your blood brothers as well as for those who aren't your blood brothers, because these are your brothers, too.”

Another of the boys said: “It happens sometimes that the father is an exploiter and the son is a good Christian and the son has to be against him.”

ANTENOR: “This division within families has to happen. And whenever there are new ideas that go against tradition, the parents are almost always

in favor of the traditional ways and the new ideas are against them.”

LAUREANO: “As I see it here he's setting the young against the old: the son against the father, the daughter against the mother, the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law. It seems that Jesus sees that the division he's going to cause in families will be mainly a division between generations. And it's because the young people are the ones who are almost always with the Revolution, and not the old people.”

I said that that division in families of which Jesus spoke was seen clearly in Cuba at the time of the Revolution. Many families were divided, and whenever there is a Revolution this has to happen.

LEONEL: “How long? Until we've reached unity, right? Because it can't always be like that. Division happens so that later there will be unity, a final peace.”

ARMANDO: “But meanwhile Jesus comes to break the unity of the family, which was considered a very sacred thing, and since the family is the basis of society he comes to upset all of society. Here he publicly declares himself a disturber of social peace.”

ANTENOR: “That business about the family I see also as a way of talking about the class struggle.”

> *He who loves his father or his mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves his son or his daughter more than me is not worthy of me*.

One of the young men said: “There are a lot of people here who are too attached to their families.”

And OLIVIA, who hadn't spoken up to then, said: “Jesus isn't saying here that we have to love the God of heaven and forget about people, but that's how it has been understood in our traditional religion. And so for example a man leaves his money to ‘God,’ as he says, because he'd rather leave it to God than to the poor. No, I think that when Jesus is talking about love for him, he's putting himself in the place of the poor, and of our neighbor in general. And what he means is that we should love all people, all our neighbors, and not just those in our family.”

Another added: “To love God is to love your brother, isn't it?”

And LAUREANO: “Your brother, but not your brother because he's the son of your mother, but because he's your brother who is everybody.”

FELIPE: “Some think they're pleasing God with prayers or songs, but singing to God is loving your brother.”

And one of the girls: “It's a matter of loving not only our family and your friends but of loving everybody, and that's hard.”

ARMANDO: “And speaking of the God of heaven—the God of heaven doesn't exist, or at least the only way we can know him is as he is made flesh in other people.”

FELIPE: “Anyone who loves other people, practically speaking, already knows God.”

I said that was exactly what Saint John said.

And ALEJANDRO: “It's because God is love. Anyone who loves knows him because he has known love.”

JULIO: “The sword splits, divides, and now I see why he says that he brought the sword.”

GLORIA: “The sword of love.”

27.

The Ones Sent by John the Baptist

(Matthew 11:1–11)

We read that John, who was in prison, heard about the works of Jesus and sent his disciples to ask him:

Are you the one who is to come or do we wait for another one?

OLIVIA: “I imagine John knew he was going to die. He knew the regime he was living under. And he asked that question so his disciples would know that there was going to be somebody else who would replace him, so they would know that the Messiah was already here. I don't believe he would have doubted. And he asked it so that the disciples wouldn't be discouraged when he died, for he had to die for freedom, and Jesus had to die for the same reason. Their fate wasn't to triumph but to die.”

REBECA: “I was thinking the same as Doña Olivia. And I also think John knew that Jesus was the Messiah, but he sent his disciples so that people would know that it was Jesus and not him, because a lot of people thought John was the Messiah.”

LAUREANO: “Also so they wouldn't be waiting for somebody else. They'd already made a mistake the first time when they believed John was the Christ and he wasn't. Then somebody else came along, and maybe now they'd think that later still another one would come.”

I said (and this I had heard from Merton) that it was also possible that John, in a deep depression in his prison, might be doubting that Jesus was the Liberator. John had already announced it in very strong words. He had said that Jesus was “with his shovel ready” to separate the wheat from the

chaff. The Gospel says that from prison he heard of Jesus' "works." But maybe those works didn't convince him. He saw his mission as a failure, his end very near, and Jesus without any power…. And we read the answer of Jesus:

> *Tell him how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are clean, the deaf hear, the dead are resurrected, and to the poor the good news is announced*.

FELIPE: "He doesn't want to talk just with words but also with deeds. If he said it just with words maybe they wouldn't have believed him. He says: 'see all the freedom I'm bringing.'"

ALEJO: "People frightened by the changes that Christianity is going through should pay attention to this. Jesus doesn't say to them: 'Notice that in such and such a place people are fasting, are praying a lot, are going to Mass every day'; he simply sends word to John that people are being cured, getting food, having their problems solved. He's saying that people are being freed."

I said that Jesus didn't clearly say he was the Messiah, no doubt because it was dangerous to say so. He never said it clearly until they were condemning him to death in the Sanhedrin. What he did here was to say it indirectly to John in such a way that John could understand it: quoting to him the prophecies of Isaiah, that when the Messiah came the blind were going to see, the deaf were going to hear, the lame would leap like deer, the dead would come to life again, the poor would learn the good news of their freedom.

ALEJO'S MOTHER said: "The poor don't have any freedom, not even freedom to think, and then they can't think about the oppressed situation they're in, and they don't even know they're oppressed, and that message is for them…. I can't explain it well…that message of freedom…. The poorest of us feel humiliated, in a situation where we can't even think about freedom or reach it; and if we do manage to think about it, we can't reach it. And that's why Jesus brings us that good news about a change: that all of us poor people in the country are going to have freedom."

And another: "At times you're afraid of the authorities, you say maybe: 'I'd better not say anything about this, I'd better keep quiet.' If you free yourself from that fear and dare to speak up, and to act, which is more

important than speaking, if you've devoted your life to God, and if you're ready to sacrifice your life, then what's going on in us is that freedom that Jesus is talking about to John the Baptist."

Another said: "And if we repeat that message of freedom, the good news for the poor, we have to suffer the persecution of the powerful. They persecute us like communists. And of course it has to be that way because they also persecuted Christ and that's why he died."

PANCHO spoke: "But Jesus was talking about freedom from sin and not about a physical freedom!"

FELIPE: "Freedom from sin and physical freedom are the same thing. To keep ourselves in poverty is a physical slavery, right? And it's a sin too. Then what's the difference between physical freedom and freedom from sin? Sin is physical too. And to save ourselves we also need physical things."

GLORIA: "And here he says that the good news is for the poor, that is, for people suffering from an economic, physical slavery."

LAUREANO: "Jesus began to bring about a physical liberation, for the blind were physically blind, the lame were physically lame…. And then he says that they hear the good news of their freedom."

OSCAR: "It says that they were blind, that they were lame, and that Jesus performed the miracle. I think it wasn't that Jesus performed the miracle of curing those illnesses but that he freed them from their slavery. They were just the way we are now, just as we're completely blind to reality (which is also physical); as we're deaf to the truth (we just hear the propaganda of the loudspeakers)."

And happy is he who is not scandalized by me.

I said that the exact translation is "he who is not disillusioned about me" and that the word "scandal" comes from the Greek and means "stumble"—literally a stone on which you could stumble in the road.

FELIPE: "It can happen that people are more devoted to money or an easy life, and then they abandon the word of God; those people have become disillusioned with Christ."

REBECA: "To keep believing in him, in spite of all the difficulties, that's what it means not to become disillusioned with him, it seems to me."

OSCAR: “Many could have become disillusioned because he had not come as a powerful king but as a poor man. This could be like a stumbling block for them, in trying to follow him. And I think to give the good news to the poor was a scandal.”

Another added: “And John the Baptist, who was in prison, could also get disillusioned about him. Maybe that's why Jesus said what he did.”

> *When they had left, Jesus began to talk about John to the people, saying: “What did you go to see in the desert?* A *reed shaken by the wind? If not, what did you go to see?* A *man dressed in luxury? You know that those who dress in luxury are in the palaces of the kings.”*

OLIVIA: “A reed that bends is a weak thing. They didn't go to see a man crumbling before power but a man standing tall. That's why he was in prison. And they didn't go to see a rich man. The rich aren't out in the desert preaching the word of God. They're in the palaces.”

Another said: “They went to see a humble man, one who wasn't on the side of oppression but on the side of the people.”

And another: “Herod was a very cruel dictator who killed children, and also a millionaire who lived in a palace. Jesus wants to point out the great difference. One was a messenger who was announcing the liberation of the poor. The other wanted all the poor to be his slaves.”

> *In truth I say to you that of all the people who have lived up to now, no one has been greater than John the Baptist; nevertheless the smallest one in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*.

LAUREANO: “Maybe he means that former greatnesses are just shit compared with the kingdom of Christ.”

PANCHO: “He says that John was the greatest here on earth but that in heaven anybody is greater.”

I said to Pancho that Jesus didn't say “heaven” but “kingdom of heaven,” which is the same as the kingdom of God, or God's government in the world. John had preached that that kingdom was “near,” and Jesus later announced that it had arrived; so he can't mean heaven.

REBECA: “The kingdom of God is love, that I know. But this confuses me.”

I said: “When the disciples were discussing which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus put a little boy in their midst. Don't you think that here too he means that in this kingdom the poorest and the most humble are the greatest? The most famous aren't the greatest, even when it's a question of the greatness of a prophet.”

OLIVIA: “Maybe it's to give us more encouragement, so that we won't feel weak or unhappy?”

JULIO, Rebeca's son: “Wouldn't it be so that we poor people won't lose heart? So we won't say: We're the last because we're poor and we can't do anything?”

I said: “I've just discovered this during this reflection with you: Jesus is saying that the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of the poor and humble. John was the greatest prophet, but you, the poor and humble, are even greater. Here there will be no one who rules others, not even as a ‘great prophet,’ as a ‘great leader.’ Or you could say that here those who rule are the tiniest ones, the most humble, the poorest.”

REBECA: “It's through humility that they rule, and through love. And Saint John was a great man because he was humble, because he wasn't in the palaces of the kings like the rich. That's why he was in prison.”

I said: “There is a phrase I often read in Cuba: ‘In this revolution the only privileged ones are the children.’ And that's true; there the only privileged ones are the children, not the leaders. And it seems to me that Jesus is saying something similar about the kingdom of heaven, that in it the only greatness is in the little ones. And what Laureano said is very true: that all the former greatness is just shit compared with the greatness of this kingdom.”

28.

“Come to Me and Rest”

(Matthew 11:25–30)

This time we had Mass on the opposite shore, in a humble village called Papaturro, on the bank of a river in the forest, almost on the border of Costa Rica. A group of us from Solentiname had gone, and in a little church surrounded by cacao trees we discussed these verses with the people from Papaturro:

> *At this time Jesus said: “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have revealed to simple people the things that you hid from the clever and the learned. Yes, Father, because this is the way you wanted it.”*

I asked: “What do you think, Olivia?”

She answered: “It seems to me that Jesus is saying that the wisdom of the world is of no value for God. That is, in the eyes of God. Because it seems to me that it's a wisdom based on money. Somebody who has no money can have just one kind of wisdom: spiritual. Money is the basis of that other wisdom, and so it's a wisdom opposed to equality and love.”

I said that Olivia was quite right, that that's an unjust wisdom, because it's a result of economic inequality and at the same time a cause of more economic inequality. In our system education is the monopoly of the rich. For example, here where we are, there are uneducated people only because there are poor people. But God's system is the reverse of ours: God gives his wisdom to simple people and hides it from the clever and the wise.

That's why Jesus praises the Father: because that wisdom is an act of justice.

FELIPE: “I see things the way Doña Olivia does. The ones who think they're smart are really from the upper classes, the ones who can study to be engineers, get their high school diploma, or anything. And their wisdom is really for inequality, for their business.”

I said that the same thing happened in the time of Jesus. The wise and the clever belonged to the upper class, and those were the ones who rejected him. The ones who followed him were simple people who couldn't read, and those were the ones who understood his message.

FELIPE: “There was that King Herod, who was one of the powerful ones and one of the ones who thought they were wise in those days. He had already decided to kill Jesus. And he brought together all those teachers and clever men so they could tell him where the Messiah would be born. But God hid his knowledge from these people too, and revealed it to the humble people, to the shepherds.”

I said Matthew had told us a little earlier that Jesus had sent out his disciples to announce the kingdom. Now it seems that Jesus already found out that his message hadn't been a success among the upper classes. He saw that it was only the simple people who were with him. But he didn't consider this a failure. He didn't feel bad about it. He thanked God that this was the way it was.

LAUREANO: “That's just what's happening now. The poor are the revolutionary class.”

ALEJANDRO: “It seems to me that the knowledge a diploma stands for isn't much, because somebody who gets one, the way things are now, doesn't know anything else. For the fellow that's a doctor or an engineer, medicine or engineering absorbs him completely. So he spends his whole life just on that. But the simple fellow is more open to other things, because he really isn't tied to a single thing. Instead he just thinks in his simple way…. The lady that's doing the laundry, well, she's thinking about a lot of things while she's doing the wash. And also when you go out to the country —it's simpler and you think more sincerely.”

“It's the wisdom that work gives you,” I said.

The teacher from a little rural school close by said: “It seems to me that wisdom is love of God. And work is love of God too, isn't it? Because with work we improve things, or we're putting something here that wasn't here

before. We're being useful. And that must be why the worker has a wisdom denied to somebody who doesn't work but just exploits the work of others. It seems to me that in this world we all ought to have a job, and we all ought to have love for God so that we'll know more."

FELIPE: "And really, true wisdom is what you learn in order to love others, what you learn so you can share with others. Ideas and things you own, too. False wisdom is what you learn just for your own personal good."

An old man from Papaturro said: "That's the wisdom of selfishness, isn't it?"

I said that education in our system is the privilege of a few. To have it is like having capital, because with it you exploit the labor of the others who don't have capital. But it's the uneducated majority who have paid for the education of those few.

And ELVIS: "But sometimes we who have the privilege of receiving the other wisdom, we're selfish too and we don't share it. It seems to me that we have to share it and we have to work so everybody can have it."

And another of the young people from Solentiname said: "That's why it's a good thing that the brothers and sisters from Solentiname have come to share this with the brothers and sisters in Papaturro."

> *My Father has given it all to me. No one really knows the Son except the Father; and no one really knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son makes him known*.

OLIVIA: "I believe that when you love others you love God. Because we don't know God, in the sense that we can't see him. We haven't seen him, neither the Father nor the Son, the way we see our neighbor. We can't say: 'Let's give these five pesos to God,' then. But when we really love our neighbor, we're seeing the Father, and it's because Jesus is making him known to us."

I said: "The fact that the Father has given him everything seems to mean that the Father has transmitted all his knowledge to Jesus. In those days when there weren't any schools that gave diplomas you learned a trade by working as an apprentice with a master. But generally the son learned from his father. Jesus learned carpentry from Joseph. And in the same way, as he tells us here, the revelation that Jesus brings he learned from his Father. This revelation is that God is love and that to love your brother is to know

God. In the Bible ‘to know’ is like ‘to love,’ and even the sexual act is called ‘knowing.’ So you can also say, as Olivia did, that anybody who loves his brother loves God. And this knowledge that Jesus brings, and that he learned as a son apprenticed to his Father, is love.”

“And he makes it known to the people he loves: to the humble,…” said someone from Papaturro.

Come to me, all you who are weary of your labors and your burdens, and I will give you comfort.

FELIPE: “I think he's seeing the suffering of the people more than anything else. We bear the burden of exploited people too…. And I think this is the burden Jesus is talking about, and that he wants to ease.”

The TEACHER: “Undoubtedly he doesn't call the rich and powerful but the people who have burdens. It's a call to the exploited from everywhere, seeing also that they're weary of their labors. In those days the world was full of slaves, and it's just the same today, except that they're called workers. To all of them he offers comfort.”

CARLOS: “This comfort he offers is not for tomorrow but for today. And he gives this comfort through struggle. And it's not that the poor are going to live like the rich but instead with a new sense of life that the people who cling to their wealth can never know.”

ALVARO GUZMAN: “He's come to free people with burdens, people overwhelmed by the weight of all the dictatorships of the earth. He's brought love so that he's the one who governs us and so that he organizes all human life, putting an end to exploitation, giving us the comfort of no more injustice.”

Accept the yoke that I put upon you, and learn from me, for I am patient and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your souls.

FELIPE: “It seems to me that the yoke he's talking about is love, the yoke of loving others.”

I said: “Yes. There was a lot of talk in those days about the ‘yoke of the law’; when Jesus is talking about his yoke he's saying his law: the law of love.”

FELIPE: “And he tells us to learn from him, that is, to follow his example by fighting for the liberation of the people. He died because he was against

the rich and on the side of the humble.”

The TEACHER: “And he says that he's patient and humble of heart, not because he was submissive to oppression but because he was able to endure in that struggle, and because his heart was always on the side of the humble and the poor and not on the side of the proud and the rich. And he says, ‘Learn from me,’ because he wants us to be his disciples in that struggle and to learn from him to have the patience to put up with all the sufferings and humiliations.”

Another from Papaturro: “We always live in a poor and humble way, but we have to struggle as he taught us to achieve happiness for all, peace among us all, and comfort for all our souls.”

I said that this phrase had traditionally been translated as “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart,” and I believed that the translation in our book was better. It seems that in his own language Jesus used the same word that Matthew had earlier translated as “poor in spirit” because he couldn't translate it into Greek with a single word. Here he translates it with other similar words. I think that the interpretation given here is very exact.

Because my yoke is soft and my burden is light.

ALVARO: “His yoke is the only one that's not slavery but freedom: freedom from sin, freedom from oppression, freedom from everything. We've been talking here about simple people and humble people and poor people. It's them that Jesus calls to, to the ones who are tired of their burdens, so that they can find ‘rest’ in him—the solution to all their problems.”

JULIO: “And the yoke he offers them is a new social system based on love. Their burden is to live together in a community of love, and that's a burden easy to bear. ‘Submit to my liberation,’ he's saying.”

29.

The Wheat Gathered on the Sabbath

(Matthew 12:1–8)

We were in church for Sunday Mass. We read how, on the Sabbath, Jesus was walking in the country. His disciples were gathering wheat because they were hungry. And the Pharisees criticized Jesus, because it was a day of rest. He said to them:

> *Have you not read what David did on one occasion when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God and ate of the sacred loaves, which neither he nor his companions were allowed to eat, but only the priests*.

QUIQUE (a Puerto Rican law student) said: “Jesus makes them see that the laws, even the religious ones, should exist to serve people and not to oppress them. If a law makes people have to suffer hunger, that law is evil and must not be carried out. The lesson is not just about the Sabbath. There are a lot of laws that make people suffer hunger, and we must do what Jesus did: disobey them.”

OLIVIA: “The radio attacks the revolutionary priests, saying that they should devote themselves only to the administration of sacred things and that they shouldn't get mixed up in politics. The church should stay inside the temples, they say. But if that's the way it was it wouldn't accomplish anything. When Jesus tells the Pharisees that David ate those sacred loaves and that he was right to do so, he's telling them that religious things aren't sacred; it's people who are sacred.”

ANTENOR (CHOP) said: “As I see it the Gospel is against ritual. That's not important, Jesus is telling those religious people; what's important is people. And Jesus wants his church to be outside the temples, establishing justice in the world. And if at any time you have to do this through political action, that's where the priests should be and not in rituals or Masses or activities like that.”

ELVIS: “Jesus is telling them that sin isn't to betray religious precepts, it's to betray people.”

QUIQUE: “People are more important than laws, Jesus is teaching. But for the Christians of today as for the Pharisees of those times, it's just the opposite. Before birth-control pills became popular throughout the world the United States experimented with them on thousands of poor women in Puerto Rico. As a result of those experiments a great number of monstrous children were born. The church protested, but not because of the monstrous children nor because they were experimenting on poor people. It was because the birth control was through pills and not through some other method, for example, rhythm. For them what was sacred was a law, or rather a legality, not people.”

> *Or have you not read in the law of Moses that the temple priests do not rest on days of rest, and yet this is not a sin? Well I tell you that here there is something greater than the temple*.

TOMAS PEÑA: “You don't work to make money but to help another Christian, and then it's not a sin…”

His son FELIPE: “What's important, we're shown here, is the fact that people are hungry and not the religious laws. Jesus talks about David and his companions being hungry. And the Gospel has also said that the disciples were hungry. That's the way it was: The people were hungry. They were hungry and they had to break their own laws to eat the wheat, because they were hungry. It's like right now, when you have to do something, like join a movement, even though many people think it's evil. The people are being screwed, the people are suffering. It's more important to make the revolution, it's urgent. That's why he says to them: ‘Here there is something more important than the temple.’”

MARCOS: “The sin isn't to work Saturday or Sunday or any other day. It's to exploit other people.”

MANUEL: “And he tells them that the priests also work on a day of rest (and maybe they worked even more on those days because there were probably more sacrifices). And by this he wants to tell them that there shouldn't be differences between the priest and anyone else. Because the priests work in the temple, and why can't the others cut their wheat, then, if it's the same thing? So he's saying that all people are sacred.”

DONALD: “That's clear, and that work could be as sacred as the temple work. And everything was temple and everybody was a priest.”

ROMAN: “If you could make sacrifices on the Sabbath, you could do any other good thing.”

FELIPE: “Unless it's a rich person making workers work to get more profit out of them.”

LAUREANO: “Those bastards didn't realize that the commandment about the day of rest wasn't because it was a sin to work but so the workers could have a day of rest.”

I said: “You're right. When God gave that commandment in Deuteronomy, he didn't give it as a religious precept but as a social precept. God tells them: ‘You will do no work, neither you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your man servant, nor your woman servant, nor your ox, nor your ass, nor any of your animals, nor the stranger who dwells in your city; so that they may rest, like you, your man servant and your woman servant.’ And afterwards he tells them that that is so that they will remember that once they had been slaves in Egypt and that he had freed them. So the Sabbath was a commemoration of the liberation and at the same time an announcement of the future society in which there would be no slavery. If under the economic circumstances of those times, people still could not eliminate that way of production, at least they should have one day of the week without slavery. This was a step forward for Israel. Among the other peoples of antiquity the servants worked without interruption. Later it was also said in the Bible that people must rest on the seventh day just as God had rested from his creation. By this they meant that just as people imitated God in creative work, so they should imitate him in idleness. But here also they spoke only of rest, not of ritual. Jesus recalled the social character that the Sabbath had had, and he made the Pharisees see that what had been meant for liberation their ritualism had converted into oppression. For in that very passage about the wheat, he also said, according to Mark: ‘The day of rest was made for man, not man for the day of rest.’”

ADAN: “He is telling them that religion shouldn't oppress people.”

LAUREANO: “The trouble is that they weren't interested in the worker. That's why they had carried their religion to such stupid extremes.”

MANUEL: “They made the law just the opposite of what it was before, Jesus is saying. Instead of being used to lighten the work and the burdens of the poor, now it's one more burden. It prevents the poor from satisfying their hunger if they're starving in the middle of a wheat field on a day of rest. As I see it those disciples were poor people, poor because they were starving there in the field. They didn't have even a nickel to buy anything. And the people that condemned them were of the upper classes, people who had a lot of food stored in their houses. And they didn't need to pull up sheaves in the field.”

OLIVIA: “And Jesus puts more ideas in their heads by telling them that the temple isn't what's important now, that the community is what's sacred. That's why he'd been talking to them earlier about the temple, to tell them that now neither the consecrated loaves nor the priests nor the sacrifices—none of that counts. What is sacred is people.”

FELIPE: “And also the priests should now say in the churches: ‘Here there is something greater than the temple.’ Because the revolution is more important than all religious things. But for many that's not the way it is: Religious ritual is more important than the people.”

> *You have not understood what the Scripture says: “I want you to have love, not to offer sacrifices.” If you understood it you would not condemn innocent people*.

CHOP: “This refers to a particular class, who must be the rich. And why? Well, because he tells them that their religion is no good as long as the people are being screwed.”

I said: “Earlier he told them something very irreverent: that anybody can work on the Sabbath since the priests work on the Sabbath in their ritual. Now he tells them something more radical: that God wants not ritual but love among people. The phrase that he quotes is from the prophet Hosea, and here love means social justice, compassion for the poor. This is in line with all the prophets, who were always repeating that God wanted not ritual but a just society.”

FELIPE: “They had the same mentality as capitalist people, who have no compassion for the poor, and who are always condemning simple people through the laws they impose on them. They are laws that are very sacred for them like, for example, the law of private property. But they are not laws that lead people to love each other or to unite or to live together in harmony. And so Jesus is telling those people that what they were teaching was drivel.”

LAUREANO: “He's telling them they don't know shit about it, that they're talking because they have a pile of nonsense that isn't true in their heads, and that if they understood reality they wouldn't be condemning people.”

OLIVIA: “It's not a question of changing the Sabbath for Sunday, or animal sacrifices for the sacrifice of the Mass. No, God doesn't want any ritual. God wants love and compassion for others.”

I said: “He's telling them that he doesn't want religious sacrifices.”

FELIPE: “He doesn't want false sacrifices.”

I: “He doesn't say that he doesn't want *false* sacrifices; he doesn't want sacrifices. Period.”

QUIQUE: “I think that when there is a just society, sacrifices will really mean something. Liturgy will be a true liturgy, and it will have a real meaning of communion with all people. But not until then.”

LAUREANO: “Well, maybe then it won't be needed. And it won't be needed either if people always live in communion, everybody sharing the same goods: food, clothing, education, and all the rest—without any inequality or competition among people, in a continuous liturgy. There wouldn't be any need for liturgy because all of life would be a liturgy.”

ELVIS: “He means then that communion isn't worth much now, right?”

QUIQUE: “Well, I don't think so. For me communion has a sense of solidarity with all human beings. I remember that sentence of Che when an old woman wrote him from Spain to ask if they could be relatives because she also was a Guevara. Che answered that he didn't know whether they belonged to the same Guevaras because his family had left Spain a long time ago, but if she felt as her own any injustice that was done anywhere in the world, well, then they were brother and sister. And I believe that's the meaning of the Eucharist, that receiving Jesus puts me in communion. That's the real justification for the church, I suppose, and that's why I became a convert. Christianity means that everybody is Jesus, everybody is part of this people, and what is mine you have to feel is yours.”

CHOP: “Communion makes sense among those who are struggling for freedom, but not among the others.”

QUIQUE: “As I see it, one part of the church is getting farther and farther away from the Bible every day. Where your treasure is, or your economic interests, there's where your mind is. When the Tupamaros sentenced to death that bandit named Mitrione, the Pope condemned them. But he hasn't said anything directly about Vietnam, only in general terms about peace and war. I'm more and more convinced that we have a great responsibility toward the world. I think that if the church had taught the true Gospel there would have been no need for Communist parties anywhere. This is something that I've learned as a Christian: that you must get outside yourself. God wants a sacrifice, but it's the sacrifice of your own self. It's love.”

CHOP: “But, you know, almost everywhere the leaders of the church are like those men who had no compassion for the hungry people who were cutting the sheaves. They also have forgotten that God doesn't want religious worship but love.”

QUIQUE: “Like a picture we just saw in a magazine: Pinochet attending Mass in Brazil. That is totally useless. We saw the picture and I wondered what that priest celebrating the Mass could be telling him. He couldn't have been saying anything to him because there was no Gospel he could be preaching to him. And Pinochet was standing, listening to him, with his bodyguards. I believe the same thing has happened to the church as to Israel: People inside the church falsified its doctrine, and people on the outside believed in it. And so now, even though some religious people are shocked, people outside the church are the ones who are practicing the Gospels most and the ones who are most inspired by the Holy Ghost.”

I said: “And now there are some new religious movements in Latin America that are limited to religious feelings. I think that this Christianity without politics is sometimes sponsored by the C.I.A.”

Because the Son of Man has authority also over the day of rest.

MANUEL: “He has authority over rest and over work and everything else, including politics.”

ANTENOR: “They had some laws that they themselves had invented and they made people believe that they were laws that came from God. Jesus

takes away from them that authority that doesn't belong to them and he gives it to his people.”

TOMAS said: “It's just as if on a Sunday, for example, I said: ‘Today I'm not going to work, I'm going to rest.’ And a bunch of people come to my house and I don't have any food to give them. And I say to myself: ‘These people are my brothers and sisters.’ And I go and get them some fish, some bananas. ‘Look, eat!’ And that's not a sin. Because people, since they are more important than the temple, are more important than the day of rest. And people decide whether to rest or to work on that day. That's the right that we have, as he's saying there.”

I said: “The first Christians changed the Sabbath for Sunday because that was the day of the resurrection of Christ, but that was not to fulfill the ritualism of the Sabbath on another day. Not even to fulfill it with less legalism. Jesus did not answer the Pharisees that they were legalists and that to pull up a few sheaves was not work. From all that you have said here, I now see clearly that Jesus was more radical. He tells them that all work is sacred, that they are all priests, that people are more important than the temple, that religion ought to be at the service of people and not people at the service of religion, and finally that he has power to establish a new Sabbath, the definitive rest of humanity, when there will no longer be any alien work, when no servant will work for another person on any day of the week, when people's actions will be free like God's actions and their rest will be like God's rest. That new Sabbath that Christ came to establish on earth, represented among us now by Sunday, is the kingdom of freedom that will exist in the future. Saint Paul announced it saying: ‘There will be a sacred rest for God's people; because those who go in to rest with God rest from their work as God rested from his.’”

30.

They Accuse Jesus of Having the Devil's Power

(Matthew 12:25–32)

We were in the meeting hut and we had had a lunch of rice and beans and fried pork (which Teresita served). This time we had with us my cousin Silvia and her husband, Alvaro, and my cousin Xavier and his wife, Sonia.

We had read that Jesus cured a man who had an evil spirit, and the Pharisees said that he had done it with the spirit of Beelzebub. And we went on to comment on what Jesus had said to them:

> *Any government that is divided into parties, and some fight against others, destroys itself; and if a people or a family is divided, it cannot endure. So also, if Satan casts out Satan himself, he himself is divided; how, then, is his power going to endure?*

Someone said: “The devil, then, is like a government that's united, without divisions, like in this government of Nicaragua everybody is united, made into a single body. Or like the National Guard. And that makes it terrible. That's something frightening: Evil is united like a single person.”

OSCAR: “And this ought to be an example for us. Because if evil is united, we also must be united, with no divisions among us.”

DON JOSE: “The devil is a united community. And we will defeat him only if we are a united community.”

MARCELINO said: “But it's not a matter of setting one unity against another unity. The rich are united but united through selfishness, to defend

their interests. The unity of the people cannot be like that. It must be a unity of love."

One of the girls: "We can cast out the devils if we are united by love."

And if I cast out the devils through Beelzebub, through whom will your followers cast them out? They themselves are contradicting you.

I said that this sentence of Jesus seemed to me puzzling. After a short silence, someone said: "It seems to me that Jesus is telling them that people in their group are not casting out devils. And the proof that they were on the devil's side was that they were not casting them out, because the devil is not divided. And so, now, people who defend this Nicaraguan regime, even though they are people high in the church, they are the devil, because they don't fight evil. They don't fight against injustice, which is the devil. And so we can find out who's on whose side."

But I cast out the evil spirits by means of the Spirit of God, and this means that the kingdom of God has now come to you.

MARCELINO: "God is love. And so that Spirit of God is the Spirit of love. The devil is the opposite of God and therefore the opposite of love. He is selfishness. It's like two governments: God's and the devil's. And if the devils are cast out, that means the kingdom of God is already defeating the other one."

OSCAR: "And so the union of all of us, if we are united by love, has to triumph over the others who are united by selfishness."

I commented that it is generally considered that the opposite of love is hatred, but I had just read, in a book on the theology of liberation, exactly what Marcelino says, that the opposite of love is selfishness. Hatred can exist together with love and hatred can even inspire love, or the opposite. But what is incompatible with love is selfishness."

How then can someone enter the house of a strong man and take his things from him if he does not first tie him up? Only in this way can he take his things from him.

JULIO MAIRENA: "The devil is united, but Christ conquered him. Here it says that the devil is a strong man but that Christ has tied him up."

Another young man: “And since he has tied him up, now he can take away his things. What are his things? The things he has stolen. They didn't belong to him, nothing belongs to him. Like an exploiter who is very rich but everything is stolen.”

REBECA: “Here he's taking from the devil a person that he had possessed, but that person didn't belong to the devil and the devil had no reason to possess him. Christ comes to free all people possessed by the devil, that is, everybody possessed by selfishness.”

ALVARO: “Jesus calls the devil a ‘strong man.’ It looks like he's a dictator.”

I said that in Saint Luke's version of this same passage Jesus said that the strong man was well armed and that he disarmed him. It seems that when it speaks of “house” it isn't referring to a private house but to a fortress. Jesus entered the fortress of the strong man and took from him all his “things,” that is, his armaments. He couldn't have done that, he said, if earlier he hadn't taken him prisoner. And so it's about the defeat of a tyrant.”

We went on to the next verse, which seemed to have nothing to do with the preceding one:

> *He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not help me gather scatters*.

MARCELINO: “ ‘Gather’…‘scatter.’ He's talking about grain, the grains of a harvest, and we are the harvest. The gathered grain is all together. That's the community. The scattered grains are all over the place, far from each other. And therefore they are lost, they are useless. That happens with selfishness. That's why selfishness ruins us, casts us to the winds, separates us from each other. Love saves us, because it unites us.”

Another said: “The devil is also a community, and it's also united but it's a community of disunion. It's united in order to scatter. Somebody said it's like the National Guard, but the Guard is united to divide the people, to oppress, to screw the people.”

XAVIER: “There are only two governments. And each government is well united. Anyone who isn't with one government has to be with the other one. That's the way I see it.”

I said that Jesus had said here: “He who is not with me is against me”; and that on another occasion when the disciples protested because a man

was casting out evil spirits in his name without belonging to the group, he said to them: “He who is not against us is in our favor.”

OSCAR: “That's very confused. But maybe I can untangle it…. ” He repeated the two phrases of Jesus very slowly, again and again. He meditated a while. Then he said: “Well, in one case he says ‘me’ and in the other case ‘us.’ Maybe that's where the trouble is. First he says that anyone who isn't with him scatters. And it's because with Christ we unite others. Without him we have no love, and instead of uniting we divide. So in the Cooperative we can unite or else divide with gossip, envy, and quarrels. And afterward he says that anyone who isn't against us is with us. The one who isn't against us is the one who doesn't divide, who doesn't destroy the union. He's one of us. He's united. That's to say: the one who is not with unity is against Christ, and the one who is not against unity is with Christ.”

I: “Can't you be neutral?”

OSCAR: “No. Because if you don't unite, for that very reason you're separating. Just not wanting to share in our unity is already a division. That's why anybody who isn't with Christ, who is the one who gathers us like grain, is separating us like a person casting the grain to the winds.”

JULIO MAIRENA said: “He who isn't with him is against him; and he who isn't against him is with him. It's all the same.”

Another said: “It's the opposite.”

JULIO MAIRENA: “It's the opposite but it's the same.” And he added after a pause: “I say that it's the same because anyone who doesn't love is selfish and is therefore a divider. And anyone who isn't selfish loves.”

LAUREANO, his cousin: “You can also say: Anyone who isn't with the revolution is a counter-revolutionary, and anyone who's not against the revolution is a revolutionary.”

WILLIAM: “Christ was not a fanatic or a totalitarian who said: ‘He who is not a follower of mine I consider my enemy.’ Let me explain: Che Guevara was not with him but he wasn't against him. Then, according to Christ, he was with him. Che wasn't interested in being a Christian because the only thing that interested him was fighting injustice, improving the world. Then, according to Christ, he's a Christian. As an example of someone who isn't with him and therefore is against him, take any bourgeois. That is, the person who really isn't with him, who doesn't care about loving others, doesn't care about changing the world, that one is against him.”

ALVARO: “I agree with William, and it seems to me that you can also put it this way: the one who isn't with him attacks him. But if somebody doesn't attack him, like that one who was casting out devils without being his disciple, then he's with him. Because if he weren't he'd be attacking him.”

I said: “And you can also say it this way: Anyone who is not unjust is in favor of justice. And anyone who is not in favor of justice (as one might say, not in favor of the revolution), that one is unjust, that one is for exploitation. It's the opposite and it's the same, as Julio has said.”

And we went on to the last two verses, which also didn't seem to have anything to do with the preceding ones, and which were also very mysterious:

> *Therefore I say to you that we can forgive people for all their sins and for all the evil they say; but if they blaspheme against the Holy Ghost they cannot be forgiven. And anyone who says anything against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but he who speaks offensive words against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this world or in the other*.

My cousin XAVIER asked me: “What do you think is the sin against the Holy Spirit?”

And my cousin SILVIA: “In the first place, who is the Holy Spirit?”

I asked if anyone had an answer, and after a pause MARCELINO said: “I've heard in the Creed that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. I've also read in a catechism that I have at home that the Holy Spirit is God the same as the Father and the Son. Now, we know that God is love. What is it that proceeds from God and is also God? It has to be love. But if it proceeds it has to go somewhere. Where? To us. Then that is the Spirit of love that comes to us. What for? To stay here? No, to proceed also from us out to others. The Holy Spirit is, then, the same as the Spirit of unity and love among us. Even though people reject Christ, if they love others they are saved. But if they refuse to love others, they won't be saved in this world or in the other.”

And ALVARO said: “It's wonderful how you get so many reflections and such wise ones, like those of the fathers of the church. I read the Bible a lot all the time, and none of this occurs to me. There's no doubt that the Holy

Spirit is among you. This Marcelino, for example, is a doctor of the church.”

31.

The Parable of the Sower

(Matthew 13:1–13)

We were in the meeting hut. Opposite us the lake was calm as a mirror, with the stillness that it usually has on these May days. We had eaten rice and kidney beans and fish that Don Julio Guevara had caught. We now commented on the parable of the sower that Alejo read.

> *That day Jesus left the house and sat at the edge of the lake. As many people gathered where he was, Jesus got into a boat and sat down, and all the people stayed on the shore. Then he taught them many things by means of examples, saying: "A sower went out to sow…"*

I said: "You are *campesinos* and you will be able to understand very well this parable of the seed that Jesus spoke from the boat. This parable is for you."

After a silence, MANUEL spoke, stammering a little: "The seed is tiny…It seems to me that he means that the message of the kingdom at the beginning is a small one, an insignificant one."

DON JOSE: "The seed is a living thing. You don't sow dead seeds. And so, as I see it, the message is a living thing."

OSCAR: "The seed is also something to eat. People sow grains that feed us. The words of Jesus are grains that he scatters in the wind, to feed us all."

"The seed is a single thing and it becomes many things," said MARCELINO.

Another: "The seed is a tiny, wrinkled, ugly thing, and anyone who doesn't know better might think that it's useless. And it's the same with the

word of God, it seems to me, when the person that receives it doesn't know what it contains."

WILLIAM, with his son Juan in his arms, said: "And there's another special thing about the seed, as I see it. It's not only a living thing but it's the transmission of life."

"We are all seeds. Seeds who produce more seeds," said NATALIA, who was the midwife.

OSCAR: "Christ rose from the dead because he was a healthy seed. In the harvest we have seen that not every seed is born but only the good seeds, the nice, healthy ones. And so, if we're going to rise from the dead like Christ we must be of the same kind of seed that he was. If we're a dead seed, a vain seed, or as we say a seed 'with the evil eye,' we won't rise from the dead. Because we've been dead for some time, we have 'the evil eye,' it seems to me."

I said: "The seed has to be buried and die to be able to be born. This is the other great mystery of the seed."

And OLIVIA said: "I think that Jesus spoke of the seed because he was talking for us *campesinos* and not for the rich. If he had been talking for the rich he would have used examples that they would have understood very well. But he used this example of the seed because he was talking our language. He was talking about seeds and birds that eat the grains and of plants that die of oversoaking and of swamps, because that's our language and because the message is for us poor people."

TOMAS: "And when we hear the message and we forget it, it's like the corn that the birds ate. You sow now, and tomorrow when you go to look there's nothing at all. The birds ate it all. The birds are the devil that carried off the message that had been sown."

His son FELIPE: "That seed fell near the road, where the ground was walked on, because everybody passes by there. That's what happens with people who have their minds closed by propaganda. They're walked on, they believe what everybody tells them, and then the message of the kingdom doesn't get through to them. They receive the message if they come here, but they go home and they forget it as soon as they turn on the radio."

OSCAR: "Another seed fell among stones. The rocky ground is the hard heart, where there is a lot of selfishness and little love. The message doesn't take root in a heart where there is little love."

I said that another seed was smothered by the thorns, which, according to Christ, are the cares of this world and the seduction of riches, and I told them what I once heard Thomas Merton say that it is interesting to observe that for Christ riches are not sweet and pleasant; they are thorns.

MARCELINO: “This seems very clear to me.”

I asked why it was very clear. And he said: “They are thorns. The thorns are tiny. They get into our skin and they're very annoying. If the thorns weren't so small they couldn't break the skin. So, riches are very insignificant and therefore they bother you a great deal. When you have something in you which doesn't belong there, it's very painful. And the more delicate the thing that's in you the more it hurts and the harder it is to take out. And you walk around with riches like somebody who has a tiny, tiny palm thorn in each heel, which will scarely let you walk.”

CESAR: “To be rich is to be bothered.”

But another portion fell on good ground and gave a good harvest; some of the plants gave a hundred grains for each seed, others sixty grains, and others thirty. If you have ears, listen!

MARCELINO: “These words about the seed that we are hearing here are that same seed, and maybe we hadn't realized it. If we hear these words the seed of the kingdom is buried in us, he says. But he speaks of the kingdom only for those who have ears.”

FELIX MAYORGA: “Sometimes the word of Jesus sprouts and sometimes it doesn't. That's what we've been told here.”

MANUEL: “As I see it, in this harvest a lot of seed is lost, maybe most of it. But in the end the seeds that produce make up for all that loss. That's what I believe will happen with the harvest of these words. The good people, who now are very few, will be a great society, because each one will become a lot.”

JULIO: “I see one thing. The seed alone, without the land, doesn't do anything. So this doctrine without us is of no use. Without us there is no kingdom of heaven.”

OLIVIA: “From that boat in a cove he was sowing there for them. And now in this group he's sowing too.”

I said: “At the beginning we saw that ‘Jesus left the house and sat at the edge of the lake.’ Quite often the Gospels speak of ‘*the* house’ without

saying what it is. It seems that these are remains of the memory of a certain house that was very familiar to them. As a detail, it says that the lake was near. Jesus probably lived there with his community, or he had his center of operations there. He doesn't appear teaching in the synagogues but in a kind of open-air school. Perhaps he left the synagogues in disgust, or more probably he was expelled. With the parable of the sower there begins a series of parables known as the ‘Sermon of the Lake,’ which were probably not the teachings of one day but of a long time. Matthew shows us Jesus seated, and perhaps that's because teachers taught classes that way. But Jesus isn't sitting in his chair in a classroom but in a boat. And the teachers taught their classes to a select group of students, but Jesus isn't teaching an elite but the whole town. These lessons of the lake are simple examples taken from daily life, because, as Olivia has said very well, he is talking for the simple people. It seems as though Jesus has already realized that the only ones that follow him are the simple people.”

> *Then the disciples approached Jesus and asked him: “Why do you speak to people by means of examples?” He answered them: “God lets you know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but they cannot know them.”*

WILLIAM: “ ‘They’ are the powerful and the rich. Now it is clear that Jesus is keeping a secret with his people; it seems that those courses he's giving are a little bit underground. He has seen the reaction that his preaching has aroused in other circles. A bad atmosphere has grown up for him, and he sees repression coming. So this business of talking about the kingdom by means of parables is also a strategy.”

MARCELINO: “But he says he really is revealing his secret to others.” And lowering his voice a little: “It's interesting to know that the kingdom of God is a secret. It's announced to many people, but always in secret. And also it's a thing that's there, but it's hidden. Like a seed that's buried, that isn't seen.”

> *Because to him who has, more shall be given, and he will have enough; but from him who has not will be taken away even the little that he has.*

MANUEL said: “I've observed that when a rich farmer sows two thousand acres of cotton, with a lot of machinery, with insecticide, with herbicide,

with fertilizer and all the rest, he earns a lot of money. He was already very rich and now he gets richer. On the other hand the poor man who has nothing sows two acres and it doesn't turn out well, and at the end of the harvest he's in debt and poorer than before. So even the little he had the bank takes away from him."

OSCAR: "Yes, that happens with money, and the Gospel doesn't refer to money but to love. But it seems that Jesus is saying to us that in his kingdom a similar thing happens as with money. Since money attracts more money, so love attracts more love. And since all the deals of a rich man turn out well, especially if he's very rich, so the person who has much love is given much more love by God. But God takes from the selfish person who exploits others even the little bit of good that he had in his heart. And if he was evil before now he turns more evil until he becomes completely evil. Because selfishness attracts more selfishness as love attracts more love."

> *This is why I speak to you through examples; because they see and remain as if they did not see; they hear and remain without understanding, as if they did not hear*.

ALEJANDRO: "The examples of Jesus are very clear for simple people. They say nothing to proud people, who despise this language of Jesus because it is simple. For some it's a revelation; for others it's an enigma. It's so simple that only the simple understand it."

LAUREANO: "He came so that some people would believe in him and others wouldn't. And now it's the same with the revolution. Some accept it and others have to reject it. If everybody accepts it then it's not a revolution."

MARCELINO: "The parables of Jesus have a double effect: Some people understand them, and people who shouldn't understand them don't."

I asked if this was clear and several said: "It's clear."

SILVESTRE exclaimed: "Now it's very clear."

32.

The Wheat and the Weeds

(Matthew 13:24–30, 36–43)

Jesus told us that the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed wheat. An enemy sowed weeds among the wheat. The slaves urged him to pull up the weeds, but he said to them:

> *No, because in pulling up the weeds, you can also pull up the wheat. Better let them grow together until the harvest; and then I shall order the workers to gather first the weeds and tie them in bundles to burn them, and afterwards to store the wheat in my granary*.

I said that last Sunday we heard the parable of the sower. In this other parable Christ told us that in reality there are two sowers: the sower of wheat and the sower of weeds. Because in the world there is not only good. There is good and evil.

OLIVIA: “But the good comes only from one of the sowers. The evil comes from the other one, his enemy.”

FELIPE: “What I see here is that humanity is divided into two classes: the ones who do good and the ones who do injustice. Some are from one sower, and the others from the other.”

PANCHO: “And we also see here that good and evil are not separate but together. Justice is well mixed with injustice. Don't tell me now, for example, that all the poor are the good ones and all the rich are the evil ones.”

MARCELINO: “Of course not. We have a world in which good and evil are mixed together. Now there's no reason to say that everything is good or that

everything is evil. But one day they'll be separated, all the good on one side and all the evil on the other. One to be gathered, the other to be destroyed."

FELIX: "As a sower I know from experience that the weed is more resistant; the good plant is delicate. That's why we can't pull up the weeds until the other plant is strong. That's what happens now with injustice, which is stronger than justice. We have to hope that at first justice will develop more."

JULIO: "As I see it, God is a good *campesino* who knows how to cultivate his field. The peons, on the other hand, were not very expert."

ALEJANDRO: "An interesting thing: First they're going to destroy the evil. Only afterwards will they harvest the good."

OSCAR: "I find here that God allows us to do what we feel like. He lets time go by so that the good and the evil grow equally, because that evil may be good afterwards and if he pulls it up too soon he doesn't give people a chance to change."

OLIVIA: "We have evil inside us, too, and if God tore it out right away he would tear us out, too. We are good and evil. Good in some things and evil in others."

And a boy who was visiting us, who was a delinquent in Managua and is now rehabilitated: "There are a lot of people who are evil, but you can teach them to be good and you can make them change. And so God gives us this chance, as Oscar says."

Another said: "Right now you can't separate evil and good completely without destruction. You can do it only by force."

OSCAR: "You can't do it, man. You pull up the weeds, and maybe you're pulling up the best. Because with time that bad plant can get better. God knows that you can begin bad and end up good, just as the good is good now but can end up bad. So God can't pull up any plant. He has to let them grow and with time he's going to choose."

FELIPE: "Maybe we ourselves will later have better judgment and will know which of us are the evil ones and which are the good ones. And then we ourselves could choose, don't you think?"

OSCAR answers: "That's at the end of time, according to the Gospels, when we'll be able to separate the good from the evil in the world."

A Venezuelan hippie: "We often reject injustice, but we fall into another injustice. We break away from the system, but we create other systems. It's

a good thing to know that a day will come when justice and injustice will be totally separate, and from then on there'll only be justice."

I said that we have always tended to believe that all the good is on one side and all the evil on the other, even though the time for such a separation hasn't come. Christians have also often believed that they were the only good people, and that all the others were evil. But the church from the beginning began to see that evil was also flowering within itself. It must have been at that time that in the Christian community they began to remember and repeat this parable that they had heard Christ tell and that later was put into the written Gospel. The lesson of this parable is very clear: Good and evil are united now in the present and they will be separated in the future.

HORACIO: "And right now I believe evil is winning out over good because there's so much injustice. Even though it's true we're fighting against that injustice, and that's what the Gospel is telling us here."

ALBERTO: "But the separation won't happen until the other life. Because it says that it will be done by the angels."

We went on then to read the interpretation of the parable, which Christ himself gave in private to the disciples when they reached the house:

> *The harvest represents the end of the world, and those who gather the harvest are the angels. Just as the weeds are gathered and thrown on the fire to be burned, so it will happen at the end of the world. The Son of Man will order his angels to gather up from his kingdom all the scandalmakers and the evildoers. They will cast them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the just will shine like the sun in the kingdom of his Father. If you have ears, listen!*

FELIPE: "It seems to me that the angels must just be people who are going to separate the good from the evil. God's going to do this through people. People have been good by nature. Evil is not of our nature; it was brought to us from outside. And God's going to make use of us, too, in fixing up that crop. Because it would be an error to believe that God is going to fix up the world without counting on us."

I said that the word "angels" means "messengers." God appears in the Bible always acting through messengers, and these are the angels. It seems

to me very natural that these angels or messengers of the Son of Man, of whom Christ speaks here, should be people, as Felipe says, who are going to separate good from evil. As for the harvest being the end of the world, as Christ says, it seems to me that it means that it's the end of evil, not the end of the universe. Because what's the good of ending evil if you also end the universe? Christ speaks of a harvest, and that harvest cannot be a destruction. He also speaks of an annihilation by fire, but that refers only to the weeds.

I also said that I believe, like Jose Porfirio Miranda, that the Last Judgment is going to come in this world (the complete fulfillment of justice on earth), which, however, does not exclude a survival after death. In the Gospels we're told that the judgment began in history at the time of Christ. And the Apostle Saint James tells us that the judgment is for the rich.

LAUREANO: “I believe when we eliminate the exploitation of people by people we're going to have something like grass separated from weeds.”

ELVIS: “It seems to me that we're beginning to see that separation in several countries, in Cuba, for example. It's at least a beginning.”

OSCAR: “I believe that the gathering of wheat in the granary is the union of humankind. The bad plants are those that have been followers of separation, and those are going to be cast out.”

I said: “Jesus says that all the ‘scandalmakers’ and the evildoers will be gathered up first. ‘Scandal’ is a word that comes from the Greek and means a stumbling stone. In the Bible the word indicates a causer of injustice, and not what we mean today by the word ‘scandal.’ Jesus is saying here that they are going to remove all the obstacles (that is, those opposed to unity) and those who do evil.”

LAUREANO interrupted me: “It's like saying the reactionaries.”

I also said that the image of the fiery furnace is to tell us that evil will be annihilated. And the weeping and gnashing of teeth gives the idea that it's something that stays outside.

MARCELINO: “Wheat is used to make bread. The evil plant serves its own purposes, to bear its useless fruit that is no good for people. The evil person is the one who serves only himself and not the rest of humankind. That's why he's evil.”

I said that Jesus compares them to the “just,” that is, those who have done justice. And he says that “they will shine like the sun,” which seems to

me indeed to be a reference to resurrection: a transformation of our substance.

ELVIS: “But I think we can speed up the coming of the harvest and of the gathering in the granary, if we start now to be just.”

TERESITA: “It's very clear now. The wheat and the weeds are those who love and those who don't love.”

WILLIAM: “Or the revolutionaries and the non-revolutionaries.”

Someone asked me why he says, “If you have ears, listen.” I said that Jesus often says that after a parable, because it's up to us to understand it or not, according to our disposition. We can hear this story that Jesus tells us like someone who hasn't listened to a word, or else these words can penetrate into us and transform our lives. To have ears is to be ready to receive this message, and that's the same as being ready to receive the kingdom.

33.

The Mustard Seed and the Yeast

(Matthew 13:31–35)

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a man sowed in his field. It is certainly the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows it becomes the largest of plants and gets to be a tree, so big that the flying birds come to make nests in its branches.

MANUEL: “It seems to me that the word of God is a very delicate thing, very tiny. At first it seems insignificant and therefore many people despise it, but afterwards it grows like a mustard tree. And so at first Jesus spoke his word to twelve people, and that was very insignificant, but it spread to others and was scattered throughout the world. And it has spread so far it has reached even us in Solentiname. It also seems to me that the word of God is tiny and insignificant because it sprouts in our hearts and you almost can't see it. But then I tell it to someone else, and so it grows and spreads like a great tree, and this tree is the transformation of the world.”

DOÑA ADELA, a little old lady, said: “We who are here have seen that little seed growing.”

I asked what that “kingdom of heaven” was that Jesus compared with the mustard seed.

NATALIA answered energetically: “It seems to me that the kingdom of heaven is unity. When all of us join together and all of us love each other, that will be the kingdom of God.”

I said it was strange that for so long people believed that the kingdom of heaven was in heaven. And even today many educated Christians continue to believe this. The fact is that it was easier to think of the kingdom in the

other world so as not to have to change this one. We know that Matthew used the word “heaven” because of the Jewish custom of not saying the word “God.” If the kingdom of God were heaven, there would be no sense to all those parables about the kingdom: that the kingdom of heaven is like a net that catches good and bad fish, that it's like a field in which there is wheat mixed with weeds, that it's like a buried treasure, that it's like a seed, that it's like yeast.

And there would be no sense to another parable, found in one of the apocryphal Gospels but apparently an authentic one: The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who carries a bowl of flour home without noticing that the bowl is broken, and when she gets home she finds that all the flour is gone. I said also that this last parable is like an image of the church, compromised by power and money, preferring to think of the kingdom only in the other life and not in this one. And therefore now that humanity is on the point of making bread (transforming the world), the church has lost all the flour. Jesus told Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world, but by this he meant that it was in contrast to all the other political kingdoms, because it was not a kingdom of power. This kingdom, as Natalia has said very well, is union, love.

WILLIAM said: “That's why he compares it with a mustard seed. Because instead of a kingdom of worldwide power, which the Jews were waiting for (which was a reactionary idea), the kingdom of Jesus is shown as a very humble little group, which goes unnoticed at the beginning: a carpenter with a few poor people. Among his disciples he didn't have one important person. Later it will also be a political kingdom that will control the earth, and that's why he says it will be greater than all the trees. But at the beginning it was an invisible kingdom.”

And TERESITA, William's wife, with her son Juan in her arms, said: “The truth is that the kingdom belongs to the poor, and that's why it's unnoticed at first. But the poor will control the world and will possess the earth.”

LAUREANO: “And you can say the same about the revolution: at the beginning nobody notices it. It's little groups, cells.”

The poet CORONEL URTECHO, who was visiting us, said: “Like this little group now that's telling us these things in Solentiname.” And he added, after a pause: “On the other hand, there are ostentatious works of the church, created with great pride, that give promise of being great things,

and end up in nothing. They are the opposite of the kingdom of God, like the Jesuit Central-American University."

LAUREANO: "And the guerrilla groups are small, insignificant, poor. And they're often wiped out. But they're going to change society. Can't we apply also to them the parable of the mustard seed?"

MARCELINO, with his calm voice, said: "I don't know about the mustard seed, but I do know about the *guasima* seed, which is tiny. I'm looking at that *guasima* tree over there. It's very large, and the birds come to it too. I say to myself: that's what we are, this little community, a *guasima* seed. It doesn't seem there's any connection between a thing that's round and tiny, like a pebble, and that great big tree. It doesn't seem either that there's any connection between some poor *campesinos* and a just and well-developed society, where there is abundance and everything is shared. And we are the seed of that society. When the tree will develop we don't know. But we know that we are a seed and not a pebble."

I said: "The great tree with all its branches and its leaves is already present in the seed, even though in a hidden form. In the same way the kingdom of heaven, which is a cosmic kingdom, is already present in us, but in a hidden way. A tree is the product of the evolution of a seed, and in nature everything is produced by a process of evolution. And it seems to me that with this parable of the seed Christ is also telling us here that the kingdom of heaven is the product of the same process of evolution that formed stars, plants, animals, people. And it grows in us impelled by the same forces of nature that impelled the evolution of the whole cosmos, which is to say that the kingdom of heaven is evolution itself."

ELVIS: "The birds that make their nests in the branches, it seems to me, are humanity now free: people who can go freely everywhere without borders of any kind and who will feel safe in the universe, without any of them ever being in need."

TERESITA: "This parable also teaches us that we must be patient, because a tree isn't created in a single day, and all the processes of nature take their time."

OLIVIA: "The kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of love begins with a tiny bit. When we work on it, that seed grows and grows."

"I've seen that seed growing here, blessed be God," said DOÑA ADELITA in her faint voice.

OLIVIA continued: “The kingdom of heaven is also taking shape in our homes with the growing children that we are shaping. They are growing up, and the kingdom of love is taking shape, which is the kingdom of heaven. It has to take shape in a child. And then it goes on developing, and if the children develop well they are going to extend that kingdom of love also. Yes, you can notice also how the kingdom of heaven is growing inside the child.”

He also gave them this other example: The kingdom of heaven is like the yeast that a woman puts into three measures of flour, to make all the dough ferment.

MANUEL: “It's the same thing. Because the yeast is also small and makes all the dough grow.”

I asked what the dough was, and he answered very emphatically: “Everybody!”

I said: “So the yeast is the love that there is in humanity. At the beginning it may have seemed small, insignificant. We still see it quite small inside ourselves, but it grows and develops, and it is going to unite us all.”

LAUREANO: “In the book we're reading now in the Youth Club we've seen how revolutionary groups have acted as catalysts for the people. That's like being the yeast of the people.”

DOÑA ADELITA: “Faith is the yeast.”

ELVIS: “The yeast comes out of the people themselves. But at the beginning it's a little group and it makes the dough grow. Without the yeast the dough doesn't grow and there's no bread.”

CESAR: “The kingdom of heaven is love, and therefore Jesus says it's like a seed that a man sows on his land and like yeast that a woman puts in the dough. Because it's the love that God has put in us, so that it will grow.”

ELVIS: “It almost comes to the same thing. The two things are tiny at first and afterwards they grow.”

I said: “And this is also so that we won't be discouraged. Here we see that our group is tiny. Many people are afraid to come. But Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven begins with something very tiny. You have to remember that this little group is also a ferment inside its dough.”

DONALD: “In many places there is yeast that breaks things apart.”

I: “What Donald says is quite true, and Christ also somewhere else tells us to be wary of ‘the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod,’ because evil is also a little group, an elite that corrupts all the dough. The yeast of the Pharisees seems to be the corruption of the religious elites, and the yeast of Herod the corruption of the power elites. He spoke that warning after the multiplication of the loaves…”

FELIPE interrupted me: “And here too he's talking about bread. Why does Jesus give bread as an example? It seems to me that it's because bread is a material reality (although it's not only material), because we have to fulfill love in a material way: by means of food, drink, clothing, housing, and all the other things produced by nature and the work of people. That's why Jesus uses that materialistic parable.”

I said that in fact the kingdom of heaven is to satisfy hunger, all of our hunger, naturally including all the material necessities. And that's why Jesus compares it with a loaf that is going to be baked; and the yeast that will make it grow is love. I also said that on the eve of the French Revolution, when the first signs of popular uprising were beginning to be seen, the revolutionaries in Paris were saying: “The bread is rising.” They were referring to the mass of the people who were rising up, but they also saw it as a mass of flour. And the revolution was the great loaf of bread. We can still say that the bread is rising wherever the people are rising. It's the whole universe that is rising impelled by evolution and revolution, until it reaches its perfection, which is the kingdom of heaven, as Saint Matthew says, or the kingdom of God, as the other evangelists say, or the kingdom of love. And this is also the same eucharistic bread that we raise up at the altar, “Which earth has given and human hands have made,” as we say in the Offertory. We offer it to God as a representation of all the fruits of earth and of work.

ALEJANDRO: “And this bread is to be shared by everyone. That's why the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves was also another teaching: to teach us to share the bread.”

CESAR: “The flying birds go all over the place, right? They don't have any nests. Those birds who didn't have any place to live reach the tree and find a place to be. They have a nest. Now we're told one more thing about the kingdom of heaven: that it's like a loaf of bread that takes away your hunger.”

DOÑA ADELITA: “When I begin to bake a loaf of bread, it's God who makes it grow for me. I say to myself: ‘Oh, what am I going to do to make it grow!’ And would you believe? It grows. And it's the same way with my love for God every day: Will it grow? And it grows more and more.”

LAUREANO: “The only thing I would say is that we've got to play the part assigned to us, as a seed that's going to grow and not a seed that produces nothing. And as a good yeast that makes the bread rise.”

WILLIAM: “There are two little words here that we must notice: The woman *put* the yeast in three measures of flour, and so she made *all* the dough ferment. This means, in the first place, that we have to mix in with all the dough, get inside it and make ourselves one with it. In the second place, it means that it's the total mass that is called on to ferment, it's with all people that the loaf is going to be formed. And this is what ‘Catholic’ means: universal. This church has this name because it's not one more religion, separated from the other religions. Its goal is the unity of the totality of people, the creation of the Universal Person.”

The poet CORONEL said: “And why three measures of grain? Why not two—or four?”

Some of us smiled. We didn't answer. And he repeated: “Surely that was the quantity that the women of that time were accustomed to mix, three measures. Like saying now an *arroba* of flour. But I think that maybe there is something more than that.”

I told him to tell us.

CORONEL: “The Trinity. The Trinity, which is the mystery of the love of God, of the community of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And also the love of the family: William and Teresita with Juan, who has been born to them and who is the son. The three measures, then, must be the love of two people who produce a third. The fruitfulness of love that always engenders love.”

LAUREANO said: “In Cuba the Communist Party is considered to be a vanguard that makes the whole mass advance. And it really is an elite of the most sacrificing and most revolutionary people, and in that sense you can say that it also is a yeast.”

PANCHO: “We're talking about the Gospel, not about communism…”

I said that in Cuba Christianity had turned out the opposite of the way Christ had wanted. It had been a Christianity of dough and not of yeast. Whereas the yeast there had been communism.

CORONEL, turning to me: “With regard to Christianity and communism, some thoughts on the subject occurred to me recently and I intended to tell them to you, and I'll tell them now to the whole community. Here they are: communism cannot absorb Christianity without ceasing to be completely communist and changing into Christianity, whereas Christianity can absorb communism (Marxism-Leninism) and continue to be Christianity and even be more Christian. To put it another way, the communist cannot become a convert to Christianity without ceasing to be exclusively communist and becoming a Christian, whereas the Christian can become a communist (Marxist-Leninist) and be even more of a Christian.”

We went on to the last verses, in which it is said that Jesus spoke only in parables, in order to fulfill what the prophet had said:

> *I shall speak by means of examples; I shall say things that have been secret since God made the world*.

Nobody made any other commentary, and I said: “The kingdom of heaven has been gradually taking shape since the beginning of the world. First it has been slowly developing with the very slow evolution of the universe and afterwards, more swiftly, with the revolutions of human society. But neither nature nor human beings knew where all this was leading, until Christ came to reveal it. The secret of evolution and of revolution (of the universe and of people) it seems to me is that secret that was hidden from the beginning of the world. Christians are not necessarily more revolutionary or more loving than non-Christians. But the Christians, as one of the Latin American theologians of liberation has said, are *the ones who know*. They know, through the Gospel, where the revolution is going, and what the goal of love is. And Christ is now revealing that secret hidden from the beginning of the world here to this little group in Solentiname.”

And I said afterwards that Christians and communists had always believed that Christianity and communism were opposed to each other, but recently the Gospel itself has revealed to us what the poet Coronel has just said: that the Christian can become a communist and be even more of a Christian. And this is also a truth that up to now had been hidden.

34.

The Hidden Treasure

(Matthew 13:44)

We next had a very brief parable:

> *The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a plot of ground. A man finds the treasure and hides it again right where it was, and filled with joy he goes and sells all that he has and he buys that plot of ground.*

I began by saying that this example has a good deal of current significance for us, now that many archeological treasures are being found in Solentiname: at the Ortegas, on Don Catucho Guadamuz's property, and on Juana's island.

And FELIPE said: “We already know that the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of love. Then love is what is like a treasure for us. Love forces us to get rid of selfishness and sell all our possessions.”

ALEJANDRO: “To sell everything in order to buy the plot of land with the treasure means to get rid of everything we have in order to be able to love. Because if you have and don't give what you have, you don't love the others because you don't share what you have with the others. When you have love, when you make friendships, when you unite with others, you have found that treasure.”

Another of the boys said: “I believe now it has all been said. Love is giving yourself to others. If not, it's a love that's not secure, it's deceiving yourself. But it seems to me that depends on what you have. Some people who are poor like us, how can we buy that treasure? Well, only with love

because that's all we have to offer. People who have more to give, they have more obligations."

I said: "The Gospel says that the man sold *everything* he had. The kingdom of heaven always demands that of us. Those who have little must get rid of the little that they have, and those who have much must get rid of the much that they have. But everybody must get rid of everything. That man was left with nothing, and only in that way could he acquire that treasure."

OSCAR: "But the man who found that treasure, what did he do with it afterwards? Did he give it away?"

MANUEL: "No, he wanted it for himself, to enjoy it himself. But the things he owned before he didn't want anymore, because he preferred to exchange them for the treasure. And Jesus gives us that as an example. That's what we must do with all the things we have, exchange them all for love in order to enjoy that love."

I said that there was a detail in this little parable that we also should notice: the joy of the man who sells everything he has to buy the plot of ground.

REBECA said: "It's like a community where love exists. There is a lot of joy in it, because everyone loves everyone. It's all one unity. It seems to me that's the treasure. And that's the joy that there is."

I said that we must also notice another detail: the treasure was hidden. And REBECA said again: "Because selfishness is much more plentiful than love. But where there's love there's joy. Where there's selfishness there's no love. People don't love each other and they can't help each other."

FELIPE: "It seems to me it's like Doña Rebeca says. It seems to me too that it's a hidden treasure, because just now we've discovered this and we understand it. The Gospel is like a hidden treasure because nobody used to understand it, right? They used to read it to us in Latin, and they preached on it in a way that wasn't even close to the true Gospel. And now we're discovering it, as you might say: we're finding a treasure. But in order to possess it, we have to exchange all we have for love, to fill ourselves with love. If we don't, even though we've discovered the Gospel, we don't possess it."

TOMAS, Felipe's father: "It seems to me that when a town is all alone and doesn't have anyone there to teach the Gospel, and somebody comes to

teach it, it's like that community has discovered a treasure, and it's a joy for everyone.”

OSCAR: “I believe all of us who come to this Mass have the good luck to discover that treasure, because we really are discovering it.”

JULIO: “After all, this example that Jesus gives here is an example about money. What this man made was a business deal. Why does Jesus give this example? It seems to me it's because people always want to have more and more and more money. And what we ought to want to have is more and more love.”

I said that this also was a very intimate experience, and that's why it was compared to a hidden treasure. And there's another detail in Jesus’ little story: the man who discovered the treasure hid it again. So also the kingdom of heaven, though later it will be a social reality, is now hidden inside us. It is within us, in the deepest part of our being, that each one of us can find it.

I asked if anyone had anything to add.

Someone added: “I think we're finding it…”

35.

The Net

(Matthew 13:47–52)

We were in the meeting hut. The lake was slightly rippled by the south wind. The boats bobbed, tied to the little wooden dock. We had had lunch and now we were commenting on a short parable. LILIAM, Marcelino's beautiful daughter, had read:

> *The kingdom of heaven is also like a net that is cast into the sea and it gathers up all kinds of fish, and when it is full they bring it up on the shore, and there they sit down to sort them, and they put the good fish in baskets and they throw away the bad fish*.

OLIVIA: “The kingdom of heaven will be established here on earth. It is love and justice among people. As we see in this parable, now good and evil are mixed up. But a day will come when the sorting will take place and only the good will be left, the good part of humanity.”

ALEJANDRO, her son: “This sorting will take place here, and I don't believe that God will have to send in the angels for that. He's going to do it through people, through a social change. And I think that from now on we can begin that purging of ourselves, of our society. We too are those same fishermen who have caught those fish.”

MARCELINO: “As I see it there are two humanities: the one that's existed so far, which is the dragnet one, with good and bad fish, and the one that'll come afterwards, which will be a true community, the community of the basket. The fish that are no good don't form any community, they aren't in

any basket, they are cast out. I think that the basket of good fish is love. The fish cast out are people who remain in selfishness, in individualism."

OSCAR: "Yes, because selfishness and love can't stay together. Just as good fish and bad fish can't go to market. Even though, to catch them, you do cast the net for whatever it drags in, and the sorting comes afterwards. The Lord must have done some fishing at times when he was with fishermen, and he knew something about the operation."

I said: "And he was also talking to fishermen like Julio Guevara, Tomas Peña, the Altamiranos, the Madrigals, and Maria Peña. This is the last parable of the so-called Sermon of the Lake, which he spoke on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, a lake like this one. Beside the lake was that house where Jesus lived, mentioned in the Gospels. And in that lake was the miraculous catch. There he walked on the waters. There he calmed the storm. There he preached from a boat. And also on those shores he appeared to them afterwards resurrected. I think that at the time of this parable he was perhaps watching some boats on the shore, as we are watching them now. Perhaps he was watching some dragnet, and it was then that he said for them and for us: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet…'"

DON JULIO GUEVARA: "And we are those fish too…"

DON TOMAS PEÑA, who is also a good fisherman like Don Julio: "A comparison isn't the same thing, it's something similar. So the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that catches all kinds of fishes, like the book says. But there's a difference, as I understand it. The fishes that are caught in the net aren't to blame if they're bad, if they're of no use to us. On the other hand, the people who are in the net of the kingdom of heaven *can* choose to be what we are. And there's no need for angels coming to do the sorting because we've already done it ourselves. We can be *moga* or *roncador, machaca* or *guapote*. The beach has all kinds of fish: there's a *mojarra*, those white *palometas* that are very good *mojarras*, the *guapote*, the *róbalo*, the *roncador* are very good fish. And there are others that aren't eaten, like the *moga*, which is *alaste* and has a smell of dirt because it eats only dirt, the *cartilla* which is skinny, skinny, nothing but bones, and the *beata*, which when it's fried has no taste and is half rotten. But on that other shore that is mentioned there, it's up to us to be good fish or bad fish, it seems to me."

WILLIAM: "It says that the net is pulled in 'when it is full,' which means that they have to take their time. And this explains why good and bad are

now mixed up everywhere, even in the church. The time for pulling in the net hasn't come yet. But this also means that not all time is going to be like that. Afterwards only the good will be left. The rest will be thrown out."

"And I think this will come rather soon," I said. "First, because certain historic signs are beginning to be seen, what Jesus calls the 'signs of the times.' And second because Jesus always insisted that all this that he was announcing, the kingdom of heaven, was 'near.'"

ELVIS: "When there are no exploiters or exploited and only a society of brothers and sisters, then we are going to have the good fish gathered in one basket. I read a speech of Fidel's where he says that in the perfect communist society people will love each other as sometimes they now love each other inside their own families. Then is when we're going to have only *laguneros*, *guapotes*, *mojarras*, *roncadores*, and *róbalos*!"

Several people said that everything was very clear. I said to them that the disciples said the same thing, after hearing this parable. And we went on to the next verse:

> *Then Jesus asked them: "Do you understand all this?" They answered: "Yes, Lord."*

I said: "They surely must have understood it in the same revolutionary sense in which you have just understood it. And that means that their 'yes' is the same as 'it's all clear,' which you have said. But that 'yes' also seems to me to be a Yes of commitment. It is accepting Christ's message and being ready to put it into practice. Because the message is not just that the world is going to change but that we have to change right away with a view to that change. That's how Saint Mark sums up the preaching of Jesus in Galilee, on the shores of this lake: 'The times have been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is near. Change your attitude, and believe in the good news.'"

> *Then he said to them: "When a master of the law instructs himself about the kingdom of heaven, he gets to be like the master of a house, who from what he has stored away can bring forth new things and old things."*

One of the young people said: "Do you suppose the man takes the old things out of his house to throw away, and the new ones are the ones he'll

use? Because the new teachings are the ones that will be followed now, I think. And the old ones are generally not useful."

Another said: "In a house old things are useful just like new things. I think what it means here is that he makes good use of everything."

And DOÑA NATALIA: "You often throw out old things and then you go around looking for them. And this is a man who didn't throw them out but put them away. Later the time comes when there's a need for that old junk that was put away and that didn't look as though it was going to be good for anything."

And another of the young people: "I believe Jesus has given us an example of that, because he uses the Old Testament and he has also given us the new one."

And FELIPE said: "I also think that liberation is old and is new. Because it comes from the time of Moses, and perhaps before then, but it's also a thing of right now. And those two liberations are the old and the new."

ELVIS: "And both are useful to us, right?"

ALEJANDRO: "We used to like certain devotions, the 'Most Blesseds' to the Virgin, the processions, and things like that, and now we don't like them any more. But there are the other things that we *do* use even though they're old. For example, the Feast of Saint Joseph. Now we celebrate it in a different way from what we formerly did. Now the Youth Club organizes it and gives it the meaning of the feast of a worker, of a laborer."

I said, trying to sum up: "It means then that not only is the new good, the old can also be good. There are old things that are thrown out because they are of no use, and there are useful old things that we ought to go on using. So the Gospel teaches us to use the old and the new…"

LAUREANO interrupted me: "And the Gospel itself is old but it's being used for today's liberation. Marxism is what's new, and it's also being used together with what's old."

I: "We can also say that love is what is old and new."

And one of the girls: "That's beautiful."

WILLIAM: "It says that when a 'teacher of the law' instructs himself about the kingdom of heaven it's like the man that pulls out old and new pots and pans. The teachers of the law were the scribes, the ones who knew about the Scriptures. Once they got only old things out of them. Now that he already knows about the kingdom he can get old things and new things."

I: “The disciples understood the parables and they said ‘Yes’ to Christ. Now he tells them that they're going to be like the man who gets old things and new things.”

ALEJANDRO: “We have understood it, so now we can get something out of this and give it to others.”

36.

Jesus Walks upon the Water

(Matthew 14:22–33)

From the church windows we looked out on a calm lake. The water at the edges was like a mirror. From time to time the mirror was broken by the leap of some huge shad. We had read a passage where Jesus walked upon the water. I had said that in Greek “to walk near the water” may be the same as “to walk upon the water,” and that some people think that that could have created confusion, and that the original story might have been only what is at the end of the narrative: that Jesus had got into a boat and had calmed the storm. But we are not going to comment on the event as it was in reality because we do not know it; we are going to comment on the narrative as it has come down to us. And we went on to comment on the verses.

> *Then Jesus had his disciples enter the boat to cross the lake before him and to reach the other shore, while he said goodbye to the people. After saying good-bye to them Jesus went up into the mountain to pray alone. When night came Jesus was there alone, while the boat was in the middle of the lake. The waves were beating against the boat because the wind was blowing upon them*.

OLIVIA: “The first thing I see here is the importance of prayer. Jesus said good-bye to the people so he could pray. And it was so he could pray that he left his disciples alone, because prayer is important. We see that the religious practices of the Pharisees, which are still followed by many Christians, were not followed by Jesus. But he did pray.”

I said: “In order to pray we have to withdraw from other people and even from ourselves and unite with that other person who is inside us and inside other people and whom we call God (or Love). And uniting with God is uniting with all the other people we have become separated from in solitude and in the night, because God is love.”

FELIPE: “Prayer is important for a revolutionary.”

I: “At least for a Christian revolutionary. A non-Christian revolutionary can have other unions with God by means of sacrifice and love of others, in a form that is very similar to that of prayer (and that will often lead one to be alone as Jesus was there that night).”

ROSITA, the wife of Eduardo, the painter of primitives, said: “When he was praying, the disciples were going through a squall, and I believe he was praying for the disciples. The same thing has often happened to us here on the lake when we get in our boats and suddenly there's a squall. But the squall passes and the lake becomes calm. And I think that he was praying for us too.”

FELIPE: “There are many kinds of squalls. The Gospel makes us see here that we also are disciples of Jesus who have been sent by him in a boat to the other shore, so that we'll go without him. Maybe we don't know why he sent us, and storms might come up. But Jesus has stayed praying for us there in the mountain, so nothing will happen to us. Afterwards the lake will become calm.”

> *In the dawn Jesus approached them, walking upon the water. And when the disciples saw him walking upon the water they were amazed and they shouted in fear: “It is a ghost!” But Jesus spoke to them and said: “Be brave; it is I; do not be afraid!”*

OSCAR: “It seems that the disciples there were afraid during the squall, weren't they? Well, they couldn't imagine that it was Jesus. Just like us, if we saw a person walking upon the water, we'd get scared and we might say it was some idiot who had magic powers. So they were afraid. Because they were struggling with an angry lake and they looked at that man who came walking in the dawn upon the water. They were afraid and they said: ‘A ghost!’ Any one of us would have felt the same. Then he didn't scold them or anything. He just said: ‘Have faith!’ He wanted to take away their fear of that storm, which could sink them. And the same thing happens with us,

who are often in a boat, as Rosita says, and suddenly a hurricane blows up. And we shouldn't be afraid, because nothing will happen to us. And even if it does, it doesn't matter because if we have faith in him we always live for him. There are not only the squalls of the lake, there are also other storms, for example, like what we're seeing right now, but we mustn't be afraid."

ESPERANZA: "The fact that he walked upon the water means that he can overcome the lake and calm the storm, because he has a mysterious power. So maybe he'll overcome the storm that we're having in Nicaragua."

I: "And in this storm he isn't a ghost, an illusion. He's really himself and so we shouldn't be afraid."

OSCAR: "Then, Ernesto, what we're shown here is that if we have faith in him, we can overcome this squall that we're now struggling with, without any need for him to be present like he was for the disciples, there on the water. We can overcome it if we all get together to struggle against the injustices that the poor are suffering. Because misery gets greater and greater and goods get more and more expensive, and that, I imagine, is a storm for us. If we get together and agree, all of us, we're capable of overcoming that storm."

I: "We might say, then, that that union of all of us is Jesus Christ, who appears walking on the water. The union is Jesus, who approaches us, for he has said that whenever we unite he will be there. And that's why he's not an illusion in our minds or a ghost, because our union is really Jesus in the midst of the hurricane."

A lady said: "I think that's true, because if a community unites (for example, the Nicaraguan people), that union is based on love, and that united people has a great power. We've seen it recently in the hospital strike, and before that we saw it in the construction workers' strike. That shows us the great power that the united people has. And the only thing we lack is more unity, complete unity of everybody to put an end to injustices. Without unity we would be as they were in that storm before Jesus arrived."

MANUEL: "That's what happened with communism. When it first appeared it frightened people like a ghost, a spook. Now that we've seen it close up we see that it's unity, solidarity among people, the true communion of all with all and also with God. It seems to me that it's like a ghost, and when we come closer we say: 'But it's Christ.' So now there are many peoples that have embarked with that Christ that they used to imagine was a ghost."

I said that Manuel's words reminded me of that famous document by Marx and Engels called the *Communist Manifesto*, which begins by saying: “A ghost is roaming through Europe…. ” And I didn't know whether Manuel was aware of that and was thinking of that when he spoke of the ghost. (Manuel smiled and nodded.) I also said that in fact communism has ceased to be a ghost. It is real, and we see that there is no reason to be afraid of it because it means love.

> *Peter then got out of the boat and began to walk upon the water to go to where Jesus was. But when he noticed the force of the wind he was afraid, and as he began to sink he shouted: “Save me, Lord!” At once Jesus took him by the hand and said to him: “How little faith you have! Why were you distrustful?”*

Another young man said: “You know, Ernesto, I'm beginning to see what Manuel says, that unity and love are a reality that's approaching us in the squall. And that ghost that he mentioned there, well it's like when there's love, and it's like walking on the water without being afraid of sinking. And we too can walk on the water like Peter, who did the same as Christ. When Christ, that ghost, appeared for the first time to the communists, they maybe didn't even realize they were loving. If we succeed in uniting, if we're in a united community, there's nothing to fear. But if selfishness separates us, we can begin to sink, like Peter. But loving is like walking on the water, so it seems to me. It seems that Peter had faith in him, and he doubted. He had faith but he also had doubts, and when he saw himself on top of the water maybe he got scared, because he'd never done that before. He saw the waves and he wasn't sinking. I'm like that. I can have great faith in you, and sometimes you've corrected me because I've done something bad and I say: ‘Why does this guy scold me?’ But I say: ‘He's right, he knows why he says that to me, he doesn't want to see me sink, drown in this lake.’ And then I say: ‘Man, save me.’ You hold out your hand, you always give me your hand, and you say to me: ‘Don't do it again,’ for example, some mistake I make. You scold me as Christ scolded Peter.”

> *When they got in the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat knelt down before Jesus and said: “You really are the Son of God.”*

The same young man said: “When he got into the boat the storm was calmed, because he was love. And the same thing will happen to us. If we're united in a single person, if we love each other, we can calm any squall, as I said. That has happened in Cuba, a country that's moving the way Jesus Christ wants. Many people say they don't believe in God. There's no need to believe in God! The name of God doesn't save, religion doesn't save, what saves is love.”

ALONSO: “When Jesus got in the boat they left their doubt behind. They had believed that he was a ghost, and he was love. When the wind died down and the lake got calm, they had faith in him. They weren't scared any more.”

OLIVIA: “When all the people are united by love it must be like Christ getting into that boat. He got in and the water got calm. That's the way it must be for the poor; the squall would calm down and we would recognize that God is there in the midst of us, that there is the Son of God, that all of us united are the Son of God.”

OSCAR: “The one who seemed to be a ghost turned out to be love.”

And DON JULIO CHAVARRIA, an old man standing in one corner of the church, who rarely spoke: “What's important for us in what has been read, it seems to me, is that these winds blow all the way over here to where we are.”

37.

Cure of a Paralytic

(Luke 5:17–26)

We had read the story of the cure of the paralytic according to Luke. Some men carried a sick man on a stretcher to the house where Jesus was but they couldn't get in because the house was filled with people:

> *Then they went up on the roof and, removing the tiles, they lowered the sick man on the stretcher into the midst of the people, in front of Jesus. Jesus saw the faith that they had and he said to the sick man: "My friend, your sins are forgiven."*

ALEJANDRO spoke first: "Well, many sicknesses, especially in rich people, are psychological and are due to selfishness. They're selfish and therefore they're nervous and so they get sick. Maybe Christ, by forgiving their sins, by curing them of selfishness, is curing them."

FATHER JULIO, a Spanish Jesuit who had come to visit us, spoke: "It occurs to me that here Jesus is making us see that physical illness is not our real illness, which is moral illness. And to cure this illness is really why he's come. And then he tells him that he forgives him his sins. You'd wonder what sins he's talking about. It seems to me that the fact that this person is carried by others on a stretcher is telling us something more: Sins are an immobility, an incapacity to serve others, and having to be served by others, or, in effect, selfishness. That's what he wants to uproot in this man, to create, so to speak, a new person."

I said that I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce brother Carlos, a nurse who had come to help us at Solentiname and who, next Sunday, was

going to vaccinate the children against polio. And I said also that it's clear in this Gospel that people naturally considered that physical illnesses were very important. They brought many sick people to Jesus. They had changed him into a healer, like Nando, the healer of Matagalpa. And he really healed. But that wasn't his mission, as it is the mission of those devoted to medicine, like our brother Carlos. Here he wants to make it clear that he came for another purpose. Perhaps he acted like this on many other occasions and the Gospel speaks of it only once. Maybe at other times he didn't even cure illnesses, only sins."

ALVARO GUZMAN, a young man who is studying to be a Jesuit and who came with Father Julio: "It occurs to me (and it might be a little far-fetched) that the group that carried the sick man is like the liberation movement that we have in our present system. There are many people who won't let them in. But that doesn't stop them; they come in through the roof. Those comrades acted in a revolutionary way, because when you have something that needs a solution you have to look for all the ways. And when they finally get to Christ, we see that Christ behaves radically toward them. He cures the illness but he's not content with that, in a 'developmentalist' way. He's going to cure the illness radically. And the first thing he does is shape the new person."

FELIPE: "He gave more importance to sin, because sin is injustice to other people. He makes us see that it's the first thing that must be removed."

JULIO MAIRENA: "The Gospel says that Jesus was surrounded by Pharisees and teachers of the law. It seems that they are the ones who are always keeping us from getting close to Jesus."

OSCAR: "And it was really selfishness that was surrounding Jesus. Because they were selfish, they wouldn't make way to let the man on the stretcher come in. That's why Jesus wants to make them see that the most important thing is to take away sin, to stop being bastards, it seems to me."

CARLOS, a Spaniard who had been a worker-priest in a mine in Asturias and who had recently married: "What I see in Jesus' miracles is that he wasn't the one that made the cure; instead it was the individual's faith that performed the miracle. He usually either asks about their faith, or their faith is evident. And I see the same thing in the forgiveness of sins. It's not a question of getting on your knees in front of Jesus Christ and saying: 'Forgive me,' if what really forgives us is faith. Through faith, it seems to me, we're constantly being forgiven for our sins. And I believe that in this

struggle for liberation faith is very important. Christ says that with faith we can even move mountains."

I said that in fact Christ, when he performs a miracle, often says: "Your faith has saved you." And I added what I had read in Jose Porfirio Miranda, that in the New Testament the word "faith" means to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that with him has come the messianic age, the liberation of all the poor and the oppressed of the earth. And that's why, Miranda says, those who believe that salvation will come only in the next world, that this world is hopeless, that there will never be a just society, and that people will always be selfish, do not have faith according to the New Testament. But Marxist atheists who do believe in this, even though they don't believe in God, have that faith that Jesus talks about. I also said that Jesus' phrase that faith moves mountains is a reference to Mount Zion, for the prophets had several times prophesied that in the messianic age the mountain where Jerusalem stood was going to change place.

ELVIS: "I see then that what he's saying is that there's going to be a big social change, and that the change will be made by faith."

GLORIA said: "That man had this faith. And this faith had already converted him, that is, it had already made him change his attitude and his mentality, and that's why Jesus tells him that his sins are forgiven."

OSCAR: "Probably not only his sins were forgiven but the sins of his friends, too. Because they all had faith, the whole group, because the Gospel says: 'when he saw the faith that they had.'"

OLIVIA: "It seems to me that sickness often comes through sin. For example, in our country, because of the profits they make from medicines, people can't buy them; they can't get cured. Children die for lack of medicines, because medicine is for the people who have money."

I said that there are indeed many illnesses in the country that are illnesses just of the poor and not of the rich, which shows that they are due to the economic system that we have. And it proves that this system is criminal. Infantile paralysis should have been wiped out in this country as it has been in Cuba and in all socialist countries. If many children die here of this illness or are left crippled, it's the fault of the government. I said also that we must be grateful to our comrade nurse Carlos for the vaccinations he's going to give, and that parents must bring their children for the vaccination because otherwise it would not be the government but the

parents who would be responsible. In this case polio would be the result of a sin of selfishness in them.

Then the teachers of the law and the Pharisees began to think: "Who is this man who is offending God with his words? No one can forgive sins but God alone."

FELIPE: "The thing is that the Pharisees didn't believe that Jesus Christ was God."

MANUEL: "That God was in the midst of them."

ALEJANDRO: "They say that only God can forgive sins. Is this right? It seems to me that people can forgive sins. When we forgive one another God forgives us." And he continued, after a pause: "It must be because, since Jesus came, God is in the midst of us."

But Jesus knew what they were thinking and he said to them: "Why do you think thus? Which is easier to say: 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Rise up and walk'?"

OSCAR: "Well, man, the way I see it, when Jesus said the sins were forgiven, the ones who were there, the teachers and the Pharisees, were full of doubts, because how could he take away sins? Then he had to show them he could forgive sins and he said to the man: 'Rise up and walk,' so they'd believe. He had to do both, forgive the sins and make him walk. But the hardest thing was what he did first, about the sins."

MYRIAM: "But since they couldn't see that…"

I said that's why he had to do things that they could see, and those are the miracles. "Miracle" is a word that means "sign." It had been announced that the Messiah was going to make the blind see, the deaf hear, and the crippled walk, and now he was giving these "signs" or symbolic acts so they would know that the messianic age had arrived.

Then he said to the paralyzed man: "I say to you, rise up, pick up your stretcher, and go to your house." At once the paralytic got up in front of them, took up the stretcher on which he was lying and went off to his house praising God.

OSCAR: “The faith that man had was a great faith. But he was helped too by the faith of the others who carried him, who had a faith that came from way inside them. It helps anyone who's a sinner to be united in a single faith with others.”

I said: “The proof of that faith is that he went away praising God. Praising God means here that he went away proclaiming that God had already sent the Messiah, the liberator that he had promised.”

And CARLOS, the Spaniard: “People alone cannot free themselves. It occurs to me that each one of us, by ourselves, are like that crippled man, who, no matter how much faith he had, couldn't all by himself get to where Jesus was. It's not enough, it seems to me, for a person to have faith. It's necessary for a group to have faith. So it's only in a community that we can free ourselves.”

All were amazed and praised God, and in much fear they said: “Today we have seen marvelous things.”

FELIPE: “You see, man, they were amazed at what they saw: the paralytic carrying the stretcher. But also they were amazed at the other thing they didn't see, the most marvelous of all: the man with his sins forgiven.”

I: “They too went away praising God, that is, proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah sent by God.”

DONALD: “It seems to me that they were very amazed especially because they knew he was the son of a carpenter. If he hadn't been of such a humble origin maybe they wouldn't have been so amazed that God had given such power to a man.”

OSCAR: “Ernesto, I ask this question: Why did they have so much fear, then, so much fear that they said: ‘Today we have seen marvelous things’? Why did they say that with fear?”

I didn't know what to answer Oscar. I thought that maybe he himself could tell us. I said: “Well, what do you think? Let's see…”

OSCAR: “I ask you because I really don't know.”

And I: “You don't have the answer? Neither do I. Let's see if anybody has it. If anybody is inspired by the Holy Spirit to answer Oscar…”

There was a brief silence. Then ALEJANDRO spoke: “I say that maybe it could be the fear that the rich felt because he was always against the

capitalists. That is, when they saw he had done something extraordinary, they saw him as a threat to themselves."

And I commented: "It seems to me that Alejandro is quite right. They saw him as an enemy of the system, and they saw that he had the power of God. And they also knew that that power of God was dangerous, for God was in favor of justice, and therefore he was against injustice."

OSCAR: "That's good. It's clear to me now."

38.

Jesus Calls Levi

(Luke 5:27–32)

After this Jesus went out and he noticed a tax collector named Levi sitting in the place where taxes were paid, and he said to him: "Follow me." Then Levi got up and, abandoning everything, he followed Jesus.

One of the women said: "As I see it this is very important for us today. We often feel that humanity is loaded down with sins and that there's no solution. These tax collectors or publicans were bad people, detested by decent people, and rightly so. Nevertheless Jesus talks with one of them and right away he changed his attitude and abandoned his dirty business."

I said that she was quite right, that this Gospel showed us that there is hope for humanity, that people are capable of change.

OSCAR: "Well, I see one thing. That man was lost, you could say. And just one word was enough for him to change. I think he knew what he was doing, that he was doing evil. And then Christ noticed him, that he was doing evil and didn't know why. I think he must have been criticized by those who thought of themselves as Christians, right? And they thought there was no salvation for him. Christ knew that he *could* be saved, because Christ was a man who knew what he was doing, and if he talked to him the man would repent. And when Christ said to him: 'Follow me!' it was because Christ was sure that he was going to follow him. And so we, too, who have at some time been bad, and maybe we've been criticized, and we heard the voice, as that man repented, he heard the voice of Christ…well, I'm all mixed up, I don't know how to go on."

I told Oscar that he wasn't mixed up, that he had explained it very well. He noted one word of the Gospel, which said that “Jesus went out and he *noticed* a tax collector.” That man was good at heart even though he was doing evil, and that's why Jesus noticed him. If religious people had noticed him it would have been to criticize him (not so much about the money but because he wasn't religious).

REBECA: “He also changed his attitude because he had confidence in Jesus. Just hearing him say ‘Follow me,’ the man dropped everything he was doing against God and followed him.”

FELIPE: “I don't think he knew what he was doing. He was exploiting people, then, out of ignorance—like many people who lead a miserable life devoted only to business because nobody has taught them anything better to do.”

Another: “What seems to me important in this Gospel is that this man abandoned money for Jesus. His change was a radical change, and he changed just like that.”

One of the girls: “Jesus just passed by and said two words to him and he got up and left. People were probably amazed at how he got to the heart of that tax collector.”

WILLIAM: “It seems to me that the Gospel tells it this way to shorten it, but that it probably didn't happen like that. Jesus first aroused the conscience of the man who was going to follow him. He must have explained to him: ‘You are doing wrong, you are swindling the people, you are charging money here just as you please.’ And he proposed another plan to him. I think he did the same thing with the fishermen. He would get to the beach, where Saint Peter and his friends were piling up the fish, and he would chat with them: ‘And how was your catch?’ and so on. He was already their friend, and they knew more or less what he was planning to do. He may have told them: ‘Well, one of these days we're going to begin to do some things…’ And afterwards he went and told them: ‘Well, the time has come, let's go.’”

PEDRO: “You also have to keep in mind the moment when Jesus called Levi. Because minutes before he had just performed a miracle, raising up a paralytic. That's why this passage from the Gospel begins this way: ‘After this Jesus went out…. ’ It was easy for him to say, immediately afterwards to Levi: ‘Let's get going.’”

I said that if a revolutionary leader, engaged in a struggle, said to another: “Follow me, come with me,” the other would know what that summons meant. So Levi, who was a tax collector of the Roman Empire, knew very well the meaning of “Follow me,” said by Jesus, who was a subversive character. The interesting thing is that then “he got up and, abandoning everything, he followed Jesus.”

We went on to the other verses. Levi gave a great banquet for Jesus and the Pharisees criticized the disciples:

Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

OSCAR: “The Pharisees were great Christians but they weren't happy to have another Christian with them.”

I told Oscar that the Pharisees didn't call themselves Christians, but they were religious people who believed themselves to be just and did not mix with sinners.

JULIO said: “I have a question, but I don't know if it's a real question. But the Pharisees, it seems to me, were like what we now call Christians, right?”

I: “Like a Christian now, yes. But Christ wanted his community to be made up not of ‘just people’ (that is, hypocrites), but of repentant sinners.”

Another said: “That business of the Pharisees is just like now, man. Because really some of them could be good and those could be Christians as we call them now. And the same with Catholics, too.”

Another: “But aren't we the Pharisees of that time right now?”

I said not all of us. That it depended on what we thought about ourselves.

Jesus answered them: “It is not those who are well and healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to summon the just but the sinners, so that they may change their attitude.”

OSCAR: “Man, I'm going to talk about myself, then, because I feel I'm a sinner. I'm somebody who's lacking in love. But you know, Ernesto, I'm fully conscious that I'm doing my evil deeds. Maybe some people give me advice, and others criticize me. I see that in spite of the things I do I'm always thinking of God and asking his forgiveness. And I beg him for a repentant heart before death comes to me, because I need resurrection. I get

to thinking also that many people were saved even though they were great sinners. Why can't we be saved if we're human beings too?”

I said that there are really no just people, that we are all sinners, or repentant sinners. When Jesus says he has come not for the just but for the sinners, he may be making a joke, for one of the names that the Pharisees gave themselves was “the just.” Jesus has come for all of humanity, which is ill and which must be healed, which is not just but unjust. There are some who believe that people will always be selfish, that there will always be injustice. But Jesus has come so that we sinners (that is, all people) will change our attitudes. And so that all of society will change, as that tax collector changed.

39.

The Question about Fasting

(Luke 5:33–39)

We read this Gospel in church. The time for Christmas was approaching (a celebration that we were not going to have because this was the Christmas of the Managua earthquake in 1972).

> *Then they asked Jesus: "Why do the followers of John and of the Pharisees fast so much and say so many prayers while your disciples always eat and drink?"*

One said: "The Protestants also criticize us in this community because we've had parties and drunk liquor."

Another said: "And there are Catholics, too, who've criticized us because in this church we don't have the prayers and the devotions to the saints that they used to have."

I said that, according to this passage, the disciples of Jesus had no special religious practices but lived like everybody else.

> *Jesus answered them: "Can you perhaps make the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then indeed they will fast."*

TOMAS PEÑA: "Well, it seems that there we are told that Jesus' people are very happy because they are with him."

I asked Tomas how he understands the fact that afterwards they will fast when the bridegroom is taken from them, and he said: "Well, sure, when he

leaves them. Now he is with them or they are with him. When he leaves them they're going to be sad. Then they're going to pray that he'll be with them again."

OSCAR: "Well, Christ is the bridegroom. When he's taken away, they'll be fasting from Christ. They won't have that food any more, his presence."

I asked if we should now be fasting and praying a lot like the disciples of John and the Pharisees.

FELIPE: "I think if we think about this, that we poor people are so humiliated, we can't be happy. I think we're going to be happy when we're free. Then Jesus Christ *is* going to come to be really with us. So he's alive now, but he really isn't here the way he should be."

OLIVIA: "There are some people who are very happy now, but there are others who are in jail; they and their mothers have no happiness. We must have an equal happiness for everybody."

I said that what they had said was very illuminating to me. I saw that the fast that Jesus announced for his disciples was not exactly like the fast of the disciples of John and the Pharisees. He really likes happiness and parties. He has brought happiness (the good news) to the poor. But we are going to be without him. These are the oppressions and the injustices that we suffer. Only when he comes will we have the true banquet.

TOMAS said: "I believe the followers of Jesus Christ can't be happy as long as they're not free. Of course, we're not unhappy because we're poor, but we're not going to be happy, either."

Somebody else said: "We want happiness for everybody, not just for the rich."

TOMAS: "Of course, we're all looking for happiness, more or less."

WILLIAM: "Yes, but there are advances, progress in that happiness, man. Where there's a community taking shape, where there's a group of united people, there you'll find progress in that happiness. We have to distinguish true happiness from the false happiness of selfish people."

I said we wanted happiness to be spread around and to belong to everyone. Let poor people drink the good wine and the good liquor. Or even better, let them not be poor any more. Let everybody in the country have their Christmas party. In Cuba, everybody, even the littlest *campesino*, has a Christmas dinner with imported wine and with Spanish Christmas nougat. Everything is rationed a bit, so that there'll be enough for everyone.

WILLIAM: “Which doesn't mean that that happiness won't have problems as well, when it comes. There's got to be problems, people adapting to other people, friction, pesky little things.”

But a day will come when all humankind will know perfect love, I said. The prophets have spoken of this as a marriage bond with God, a betrothal. Each time that two people join in marriage they foreshadow that union that all humankind will have with love. And Christ alludes to that wedding when he describes himself as the bridegroom (who for the moment is without the bride). We went on to analyze these other sayings of Jesus:

> *No one cuts a piece from a new garment to mend an old garment. If he does so, he spoils the new garment; besides, the new piece doesn't go well with the old garment.*

FELIPE: “It seems to me, Ernesto, that the teachings of Jesus were new, and so they couldn't be put with the old ones.”

I said that in fact they had been asking Jesus about religious practices (fasting and long prayers by the disciples of John and the Pharisees), and he seemed to be telling them now that that was an old religion and that he was bringing something new. They could keep the old garment, if they weren't willing to throw it away just yet, but the new garment was not going to be ruined by using it as a patch on the old garment.

“And what he's bringing, which is completely new, doesn't go very well with the religious practices of Judaism,” added WILLIAM.

“In modern language what it means is: I come to bring a revolution. I don't come to mend the old system with patches; I come to revolutionize everything,” I said.

FELIPE: “A real revolution, notice. Because all the leaders of that system were against him. Just like nowadays. All the rich people are against the church, or better, against the true Christian religion.”

“They are living in the past,” I said, “and they don't want anything new, which is brotherhood and love. They are all against change. They are with the old garment.”

PEDRO: “A bank is an old garment. You don't cure anything by getting that bank to give a thousand *pesos* to the needy at Christmas time. That's just like sticking on a patch.”

Nor does one put new wine into old wineskins; because, if he does, the new wine bursts the wineskins, and both the wine and the wineskins are lost.

JULIO: “It seems to me that business of the new wine is the new person. Christians have to be completely new persons in their way of thinking and acting and everything. So they have to be young.”

EDUARDO: “We have to begin by gradually making ourselves new then, so we can live in the new society.”

WILLIAM: “And it's not enough just to have the new person, as some people say: ‘What's important is to change the person, the conversion of the heart.’ No, structures need to be changed, too. The new wine has to be in new wineskins. And Christ is also telling us here that the new can't be mixed with the old.”

And no one who tastes the old wine will later want the new, because he says: “The old is better.”

I said that to those who know about wines the mature wine is better than the new wine. But it seems that according to Christ we shouldn't have such tastes. We have to prefer the new wine that he brings above any old wine.

FELIPE: “The old social system, a society of rich and poor, is the old wine. It's better that way for many people, for people who profit from inequality. The new religion is that a few people shouldn't monopolize everything but that everything ought to be shared among everybody. That's the new wine that a lot of people don't like.”

Another said: “The old religion suits old people, but not young people.”

LAUREANO: “I like the new and I don't like the old.”

OLIVIA: “Well, in the old religion they didn't explain the Gospels the way they're explained now. The priests began to talk: blah-blah-blah and the Gospel…It wasn't the Gospel, it was a sermon they were giving! I remember a sermon that was given here. It was this, that, and the other, but what did the people want to know about all that. Why, what we wanted was to have it explained and to get something out of it. Now we read the Gospels and we're satisfied.”

And JULIO said: “It seems to me that we'd already lost our religion. The old-time old folks still had their faith, but it was quite different. And now

we have a faith, and we also want happiness, and to live in a new society. Now the Gospel has come, and we don't like what we had before.”

40.

The Man with the Withered Hand

(Luke 6:6–11)

We read that Jesus was teaching one Sabbath in the synagogue and there was a man there with a withered hand. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees wanted to see if he would cure him on the Sabbath, in order to have something to accuse him of. He said to them:

> *I am going to ask you a question: "What is it that one is allowed to do on the day of rest, good or evil? To save life or to destroy it?"*

I said that among the things one could not do on the Sabbath was to treat sick people, unless they were in danger of death.

Another said: "In order to worship God they failed to help their neighbor. That often happens with religion. Instead of helping others, it helps to continue oppression. We have to oppose that kind of religion as Jesus opposed it."

And another: "They weren't doing anything as far as God was concerned. Because the thing they had least of is what God wanted most of, and that's love."

"There are people who keep religious precepts very well, but when others are suffering hunger, misery, sickness, they don't care. They're just like those Pharisees," said a third.

I referred to some posters on a bulletin board in the church and notices that some young people in Managua had been handing out in the cathedral moments before the earthquake. They spoke of the falsely religious celebration of Christmas while so many poor people in the outlying districts

of the city were suffering from hunger. And that night these young people were beginning a three-day fast, in the cathedral, to protest that celebration. And I said that the message of those young people was the same that Jesus gave in the synagogue with regard to the observance of the Sabbath by the Pharisees.

LAUREANO: “There are lots of people who don't want to go to churches like this one of ours, where love is preached, because they don't talk about God in them any more. As if talking about love, about the solidarity of all people, about companionship, wasn't talking about God. And they think that to talk about injustice here is to profane the church.”

JULIO: “To have Christ praying in the synagogue seems fine to them. To have him curing a crippled man is a sin. There are a lot of people who still think that way, that the church is for praying but not for curing the ills of society. They don't want us to perform miracles. Because taking care of the needs of others is always performing a miracle for them.”

WILLIAM: “Jesus asks them what's permitted on the day of rest, doing good or doing evil. And of course anyone who isn't doing good is already doing evil as a result. Not to cure a man who is ill is to keep him in illness. And so the leaders of the church who say that they don't get mixed up in politics, just by saying this they're getting mixed up in politics, preserving injustice.”

I asked why Jesus also talked about saving life or destroying life, when the man wasn't dying but only had a withered hand.

ALEJANDRO said: “There are many ways of destroying life, not just by killing. To keep people in sickness and misery is like destroying their lives, because it's a life that's not a life. Besides, they were already thinking about destroying his life. They were criminals.”

> *Then Jesus looked at all those who were surrounding him and he said to the man: “Hold out your hand.” The man did so, and his hand was sound. But the others were very angry, and they began to wonder what they could do against Jesus*.

REBECA: “Because they were selfish. They had no love for the sick man. They didn't care about anything except keeping the Sabbath. Then when they saw that Jesus performed the miracle, they got very angry, and what

they wanted was to kill him. Because that miracle went against their religious practice.”

FELIPE: “They were angry because they saw that Jesus had a law different from their law. The same thing happens now with the rich, and with all of us who are selfish: We don't like it when we're told we must help, serve others, share.”

TERESITA: “What Jesus was showing them, when he put that man in front of them, is that they had religious traditions that wouldn't allow them to practice love.”

I said that among the oldest manuscripts that are preserved from the Gospel according to Luke there is one that has a saying of Jesus not in any other manuscript or recorded by the other evangelists, and for that reason it has been left out of the Gospels. That manuscript says that Jesus saw a man working in the field on the Sabbath and said to him: “My friend, if you know what you are doing, you are blessed; but if you do not know, you are wicked and you are breaking the law.” Some think that this may be an authentic saying of Jesus, and I am convinced that it is, because it is very revolutionary. It's hard to think that those words would have occurred to anyone except Jesus himself.

FELIPE: “It's clear. If he had the mentality of the Pharisees but didn't observe the Sabbath, if he thought work was a sin but was doing it anyway, he was doing evil. But if he did the work because he knew that the only precept is the law of love, he was close to the kingdom of heaven. A man who works believing that work is a sin is doing it out of avarice. The man who believes that his work is not evil is doing it for love. He's working for others, not just for himself. He thinks that to plough the field so there will be bread, even though it's the Sabbath, is a good thing.”

MANUEL: “It means that if a person works on Sunday, you can say the same thing to him: If you don't know, if you believe what you've been taught and you don't conform, you're evil; but if you know that that precept of not working on Sunday is nonsense, you're close to the kingdom of heaven.”

I said afterwards that the advances of medicine were due to Jesus. The first Christians, following the example of his cures, devoted themselves to taking care of the sick. That wasn't done before. The sick were abandoned to their illness. That Christian concern for the ill produced the advance of medical science. But nowadays in capitalist countries medicine has become

very unjust. Its advances are no longer progress for humanity but a retreat, for most of them are only for the rich. Often enormous resources are used to prolong for a little while the life of someone beyond any hope of recovery, while countless children are dying for lack of the most elementary medical services. The same thing can be said about this classist medicine that was said by Jesus: That not to do good is to do evil. That not to save a life is to destroy it.

WILLIAM: “The truth is that in today's world there are two kinds of people: Some are on the side of life and others are on the side of death.”

41.

The Other Cheek

(Luke 6:27–31)

But to you who hear me I say: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who insult you."

There was a long silence. Nobody spoke. We heard only the hubbub of some children playing in the church, and outside the murmur of the lake. I asked if anyone had any comments to make. Everyone kept silent.

"What do you say, Laureano? Don't you want to speak?"

He smiled and said: "No, I don't want to speak; that nonsense is very confusing. That's crazy."

OLIVIA: "That's a very difficult thing, but we have to do it, because the Gospel orders us to do it. The words are very clear."

I asked if they thought this was practiced much here in Solentiname. And some answered Yes and others No.

ANDREA, Oscar's wife, said: "Nonsense! We answer evil with evil. When they insult us, we insult back."

Another said: "I believe this *is* practiced quite a lot in this group."

LAUREANO: "It's true that we don't usually insult each other."

REBECA: "I understand that God wants us all to love each other, not to have enemies, because he has come to give us love here on earth. He hasn't come to give us hatred. Then what he wants is for all of us to love each other and not to have enemies. For all of us to treat each other with love, because he ordered it and that's how it's written."

I said: “Rebeca has told us one thing very clearly: The kingdom of God is love, and therefore we cannot have hatred in that kingdom. And therefore we are commanded to love our enemies. Is that clear enough?”

WILLIAM asked: “Even class enemies?”

I said: “In the class struggle we are struggling to put an end to the division into classes. As long as we are divided into classes, with opposed interests, we have to have class enemies. But if we struggle to unite with them and to form all together a humanity united in classless society, then we are struggling for love and not for hatred. Marxists sometimes talk about hatred. And Che has a phrase or two in which he says that the revolutionary must hate. But I think that is just a way of talking, a little like what Jesus says: ‘He who does not hate his father and his mother is not worthy of me.’ We Christians have always said: ‘We must hate sin and love the sinner.’ I have the impression that Che never fought because of hatred of other people but because of hatred of injustice. I was very pleased by a phrase that I heard from a Marxist priest in Chile, Father Arroyo, on one occasion when we had a small Eucharist in his home. A priest was defending revolutionary hatred and he said to him: ‘Only love is revolutionary, hatred is always reactionary.’”

OLIVIA: “What Rebeca said was very well put: God is love and he has come to give us love, and we must have love and give each other love. But love is not expressed by repeating that little word ‘love.’ Love is expressed simply by loving each other. If someone doesn't love you and you can help him out in some way, you can put an end to that hatred. Love destroys hatred. This commandment I believe is for unity.”

FELIPE: “And so in the community there would be no enemies. This is also a practical teaching, then, for the community.”

MANUEL: “But we have class enemies. And how are we going to manage to struggle against the enemy if we have to love him? How are we going to defend ourselves?”

MARCELINO, slowly: “If we hate, we are no longer struggling against the enemy…We are the enemy, because we are evil…He says we must love the enemy, but he doesn't say we can't fight them…The question is how are we going to fight them. If they hate, the weapon against them is love. The difference between us and the enemy is that we fight them without wanting to oppress them, only to liberate them. They do hate us. But we are no

longer the opposite of them if we answer hatred with hatred…I say that it is with love that we can defend ourselves."

> *If someone strikes you on one cheek, offer him also the other cheek. And if someone takes your coat from you, let him have your shirt also.*

JULIO RAMON, incredulous: "Does this mean that the poor person must suffer and let people take his things away from him?"

LAUREANO: "It seems to me that this applies to the rich: They should let people take their things from them. He talks about a coat, right? And poor people are always in shirtsleeves [laughter]. So when the revolution comes and their farms are taken away, their factories, their extra houses, they shouldn't put up any resistance. And if they lose one piece of property, let them offer up the other piece."

FELIPE: "Let them give it up freely and give more than is asked of them. This is for the haves. What can the poor give, if they don't have anything? The Christian should be detached from everything, not wanting to defend property with force."

MANUEL: "Then what it says about the other cheek is only for the rich, and the poor should never turn the other cheek?"

I said: "This is also a precept for the poor, and it is very revolutionary. I mean that we must pass over our own personalities, put aside all personal pride and all individualism, fight not for our own interests but for those of other people. This doesn't mean not to fight. It means not to fight for yourself but for others. And Christ says to turn the other cheek, but it's *your* other cheek, not the other cheek of other people. Christians who don't fight for the revolution aren't turning either one of their two cheeks. They're turning the cheeks of undernourished children, of the hopelessly ill, of abandoned widows, of workers robbed of their work."

WILLIAM: "And I believe that in the revolutionary struggle, turning the other cheek, your own other cheek, is also a very effective weapon. The man who gives the punch feels worse than the man who takes the punch. The work stoppage, the peaceful demonstration in front of guards armed with machine guns, the hunger strike, the takeover of factories or churches or universities: all these are turning the other cheek. And I remember what Gigi, our Peruvian friend, was telling us about what the students in Lima

had done during the Belaúnde regime. When a guard was beating a student the rest of the students would speak to the guard with love and so would disarm him. And if the guard went on beating, they would say: ‘Hit him harder, if it makes you feel good, hit him harder, don't stop, hit him.’ It's a way of appealing to the good that's in the hearts of the most evil of people. And something like this happened here with that guard who was bothering us so much because of what we were saying in these meetings and he kept on saying that he was going to screw us because we were communists. The boys and girls of the Youth Club went and talked with him in a friendly way. They treated him with love, and he changed. Not right away. At first he denounced them to the commanding officer at San Carlos, saying that a group of young people had gone to his house to attack him. And he went on saying bad things about all of us. The group went back again. They told him he was poor like them, one of the exploited. And he admitted that he was, that he was very badly paid. Now, even though he's not in that post, now he's even our friend. And it was clear that at heart he was not an evil person. He was a guy who thought he had to be evil because he was a guard. And when he saw some friendly human beings, who didn't answer him with hatred, he changed, and his bad will toward us disappeared. This too is blessing those who curse us, doing good to those who hate us. There are some other examples of this. When Batista's army would capture guerrilla fighters, they murdered them at once; when the guerrilla fighters took wounded prisoners, they took care of them and then set them free. Che tells how once when Fidel freed some wounded prisoners, he gave them what little medicine was left. And Che protested to Fidel because their troops were left without any medicine. But Che behaved just the same in Bolivia. Inti Peredo, who fought with him, tells how he treated the enemy without any ill feeling and took care of their wounds. General Torres, who was just overthrown in Bolivia, earlier fought against Che's guerrilla fighters and was captured by them. He told how he became a leftist because of the good treatment that Che had given him and because of the discussions they had had. This also is offering the other cheek to the armed enemy. But there is a saying of Martí's that Che repeated a lot: that we ought to feel any blow to anyone anywhere in the world as if it had been on our own cheek.”

DONALD: “It's obvious that the greatest example of that was given by Jesus Christ himself, who forbade his disciples to use arms to save him and who died praying for his enemies.”

ALEJANDRO: “A clarification: It's a different thing to let yourself be beaten because you're weak or a coward. You do it because you're brave. And sometimes maybe you won't turn the other cheek but will react differently. When Jesus was beaten in the house of Caiaphas, he protested against the man who struck him, and he reasoned with him. Maybe by this he was trying to show us what he meant by ‘turning the other cheek.’”

I said: “These words of Christ can be understood in a reactionary way (and they have been so understood many times) or in a revolutionary way, as we are understanding them now. And I believe that the only correct way of understanding them is the revolutionary way.”

TOÑITO (a student who is going to be a Jesuit): “But we must also remember what it says at the beginning: ‘But to you who hear me I say…’ He's talking to the poor. They must love each other. If somebody takes something away from you, maybe they need it more than you do, and then you shouldn't ask to have it back.”

RAMON: “Then are we defending injustice? The person who takes from us what we maybe need? The poor have to defend what little they have because what they have isn't enough for them. Can the rich take things away from the poor?”

REBECA: “Jesus is talking inside the justice area. Everything is justice there, because the Gospel has no injustice. Everything will have to be done with justice, without exploiting anybody. We have to give ourselves to each other, but all inside the justice area, with no exploitation, no selfishness among us. That's the way it seems to me.”

ADANCITO, softly: “If we all ought to give things to each other, how much more should the rich hand over what doesn't belong to them, and how much more reason there is to keep the rich from taking things from the poor.”

GLORIA, Olivia's pretty young daughter: “Well, the only thing to do is to struggle so we'll all live equal, nobody will exploit us, nobody will oppress us, nobody will be rich, and nobody will be poor.”

Give to anyone what he asks of you; and he who takes from you what is yours, do not ask him to give it back.

“It's the same thing in different words,” said somebody.

“But stronger,” added somebody else.

TOÑITO: “I believe we shouldn't understand this just passively: that when somebody takes something from us that they need, we should give it to them. We're also shown that when we don't have what we need we ought to take it. If somebody has more things than they need and somebody else needs them, they are obliged to give them up. The Gospel is saying it here. And therefore we're obliged to take them away, I believe.”

JULIO (after we have all been silent): “I think this is clear. Why should they take things away from the poor if we don't have anything? The Gospel must be talking here of taking things away from the rich, who are the ones that have things.”

I said that we see clearly that here it says that those who have must give, and that they mustn't try to keep things but share them with others. And so we'll have that society that Gloria talks about, in which we're all equal.

DON VENTURA: “And if somebody steals? Should stealing be permitted also?”

TERESITA: “If somebody steals, you have to give to that one, too. Maybe not your shirt, but certainly some instruction. He did what he did through ignorance. He has to be taught that he shouldn't do it.”

Do unto others as you wish them to do unto you.

JULIO: “Just as the rich want us to work for them, so also they should work for us.”

I said that this system is called socialism. Everyone works for everyone.

FELIPE: “To want for everyone what we want for ourselves means that we're all going to be equal.”

I said that here Christ is really planning a new society for us. I asked Laureano: “Now do you agree?”

He smiled. He blushed a little. I asked him again: “Is it clearer now?”

He nodded. And he said: “I was very confused before.”

42.

Do Not Judge Others

(Luke 6:37–42)

Do not judge others, and God will not judge you. Do not condemn others, and God will not condemn you.

OLIVIA: “I think ‘judge’ means to think evil about somebody. I'm missing a ring and I think that what's-her-name stole it. And maybe she didn't. I judged her unfairly.”

Somebody else said: “But you can suspect somebody if she is suspicious…”

And another: “But you can't be certain if it's not clear to you.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “That means that you ought to talk about what you see and not talk about what you don't see.”

OLIVIA: “Well, if we talk when we see, we're not judging.”

TOMAS again: “In other words, talking about what you don't know about.”

ALEJANDRO: “It seems to me that the word ‘judge’ means to make a judgment on a person. The other thing would be false evidence, or slander.”

FELIPE, Tomas's son: “To judge here, it seems to me, means to condemn. Because it says in the same verse: ‘Do not condemn others.’”

FELIX: “And how many times we condemn others unjustly. The jails are full of innocent people, because a person can be jailed for a simple suspicion: I mean if he's poor and has nobody to defend him.”

JOSE ARANA: “And how often the innocent are in jail and the criminals go free.”

Forgive, and God will forgive you.

Somebody asked: “And how can you do this in today's society, forgive crimes?”

GIGI, our Peruvian friend, answered: “This can't be applied to today's society, which is unjust. But a Christian society, or a revolutionary society, which is the same thing, can and must reach the point of having no repression, no jails, no police.”

TERESITA: “But can't a community judge, a community like ours?”

MARIITA: “It seems to me that a just community, that is, a community like this one, can judge.”

WILLIAM: “This passage refers to the judges (in the current system), the police, the guards, that is, all those who do the repressing. But it also applies to us. We have to treat each other with forgiveness and not with harshness, and nobody should act as a judge or a policeman or a guard toward his brother. Nobody should control anybody, because we're all equal and nobody is better than anybody else.”

DONALD, Alejandro's brother: “We must forgive each other's offenses and go on treating each other always like brothers. Like brothers who get along well and not like brothers who get along badly.”

“And as for forgiveness in this society,” said someone else, “the truth is that the rich are always absolved and the crimes of the poor are punished very harshly. There is no forgiveness for them if they are poor.”

I said that a boy had been here who was a delinquent, one of those who broke into homes. He had reformed and he told us that they would arrest the thieves in Managua and a week later they would free them if they promised to pay a thousand *pesos* to the police and the lawyer. And then the thief had to break into another house to get the money; soon afterward he would be arrested, even though he hadn't done anything, and once again he would have to steal to pay the thousand *pesos*. And so he could never reform (although some of them wanted to). This boy hadn't stolen a thing for two years but they kept arresting him. Finally, although he was no longer a thief but an honest Christian, he had to steal a wallet from a man to be able to pay his fare to somewhere else.

GIGI said: “But in Cuba and in China they don't usually arrest delinquents. They put them on farms where they are out in the open air working on something productive and getting trained and they have sports

and get political education and they can go to visit their families on weekends. So they get rehabilitated, not punished by society but forgiven by society. And it seems to me that that's what the Gospel is telling us here, that there shouldn't be jails or punishments, and that the only law of society should be the law of love."

> *Give to others, and God will give to you. He will put into your purse a full measure, packed down, shaken down, and stuffed. Because with the measure with which you measure, you will be measured.*

I said that the measure was a measure of grain. Jesus was talking to them in *campesino* language, as we might say a "bushel."

LAUREANO: "This must apply to those who have something to give. And those who have something to give are the ones who don't give. We don't have anything to give; the poor don't have to give anything."

OLIVIA: "Nevertheless the poor give a tiny bit of what they have. There's scarcely a poor person who won't give to another brother, to another neighbor. If he has a pound of salt, he shares it with his friend who asks for some. And he never lets him go away without what he needs."

I said: "There's one application for the rich, the one that Laureano has made, and there's another application for the poor, the one that Olivia has made. There are different social classes, and the Gospel doesn't apply equally to all the classes. The rich ought to give, as Laureano has said, until we are all equal and there are no classes and we have a society in which everything is shared just as the poor share that pound of salt that Olivia speaks of. There is a saying of Jesus which is not in the Gospels but which we know through Saint Paul, who must have heard it from someone who had heard Jesus say it: 'It is better to give than to receive.' But it is also good to know how to receive. There are some who know how to give but not to receive. And there are some who don't know how to give or to receive. They only know how to buy and sell."

GIGI: "But when we all give and receive, as Christ says, what we'll share with the generosity of the pound of salt will no longer be a pound of salt but a great abundance and wealth for everyone."

MARCELINO: "It's not only money that you can give: also knowledge, teaching people to read. Or you can give time, working for the Cooperative, for community causes."

COSME: “Another thing you can give is good advice.”

JULIO: “And that's something that poor people can really give to rich people.”

“What advice?” someone asked. And JULIO answered: “To give to the poor. To stop being rich.”

GIGI: “And then we'll have a different society, without rich people, when everyone will give their work and their time, not to pile up things for themselves but for all of society.”

“First they have to begin to give back what doesn't belong to them,” said somebody.

And REBECA: “But the rich, if they're going to understand these things, have to read the Scriptures. Because the rich who don't even read the Scriptures don't understand anything. They're deceived by their selfishness. God knows the rich, and he said it would be hard for them to be saved, unless they study the Scriptures.”

I said that there have been some rich people who have really studied the Scriptures. Then money no longer interested them and they devoted themselves to serving others. That had been the case with many saints, and also with many revolutionaries. And nowadays among middle-class families there are young people who have no interest in money, because they are Christians or revolutionaries, or because they are at the same time Christians and revolutionaries.”

“Those have already stopped being rich,” said someone.

OLIVIA: “Rebeca said that the rich should know the Scriptures, but the truth is that they know them, but they don't pay any attention to what they say. They're more interested in money than in salvation, it seems to me.”

REBECA: “But if they understood the Scriptures, these Gospels, they would change.”

COSME: “There are people who don't come close to believing in anything!”

TOMAS PEÑA: “They don't like to hear these things. If they hear them at Mass, they probably leave and go to another Mass.”

JULIO: “They know, man! What happens is that they don't do what they know they should. There are others who don't read the Gospel but they practice everything it says and they stand for love and everybody being equal.”

TOMAS: “I imagine some would rather go on some spree, to one of their great parties, than go to Mass. Because they probably say: ‘Everyone there will be taking shots at me. Because there's a lot of poor people there and they're going to be fighting with me.’”

OSCAR: “There are a lot of people who don't have any religion and they say their God is money.”

I said: “There are others who want to be both Christians and rich. Even Christians and millionaires. And they think they can do this if they give to charity.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that this business of our giving to others so that God will give to us, or that God will give to us as we give to others, is the same as saying we must do to others as we want them to do to us. Because the truth is that God does to us as we do to others.”

MANUEL: “It seems to me that the business about filling the purse with a full measure is that God always gives more to those who give. He increases what they have. I mean he makes them more generous, he makes them better hearted, he gives them more love. And also in the resurrection he can give them an even better prize, now that they're free.”

GIGI: “Giving doesn't make you poor is what the Gospel says here; giving makes you rich. Rich in love, as Manuel has said, but also in material things. I mean that in an economy based on giving and not taking away there's much greater abundance of material goods than in an economy of avarice and selfishness.”

WILLIAM: “But the main prize, it seems to me (the filled purse, the full measure), is sharing it all with others. It's love.”

OSCAR: “But look, William: with the same measure that you give with, you receive. Because if you are hardened toward another person, your heart hardens. If you see another as evil, and he's not evil, it means that you're evil. And to the extent that you see someone as evil when he isn't, to that extent you're evil. So judging another person as evil makes me evil. Condemning another condemns me.”

Can a blind man perhaps act as a guide for another blind man? Won't they both fall into some hole?

OLIVIA: “That's the priests who don't know about this. They read the Gospel a lot and they don't know that it's against the rich. And they get you

all confused. I remember the priests used to preach to us that the Protestants were blind guides. But they themselves were on the side of the rich and the powerful. They were really the blind guides. Catholics or Protestants, blind guides are the ones who read the Gospel that says, ‘Woe to you rich!’ and they're so comfortable they don't see it. They preached a lot of things, but they didn't preach love, and they didn't practice love. And we were blind in that same chain, and we didn't show any love for others either.”

MANUEL: “Blind Christians led by other blind Christians. The wrong leading the wrong.”

MARIITA: “I think there are parts of the Gospel that they don't read. They don't know about this.”

GIGI: “They do read it but they don't understand it. They explain it to themselves some other way.”

OSCAR: “I don't think they read it. If they did they'd understand it as it is, because it's very clear. The rich know more than the poor because they've studied a lot, yet we poor people understand this. Why don't they understand it if we understand it?”

GIGI: “The rich have studied more than the poor, as Oscar says, but they don't know more than the poor. They don't know more than you do, and the proof is that all this is very clear to you but they don't understand it.”

WILLIAM: “It says ‘fall into the hole.’ The hole is the society of injustice and exploitation into which we've fallen. Because the guides were blind. And all the people have been blind with them. This is alienation. Until the time comes when the people open their eyes, and this is conscientization.”

> *No disciple is more than his teacher, although when he ends his studies he will become like his teacher*.

“The teacher is Jesus Christ,” said GLORIA.

REBECA: “Those who live in great luxury, it seems to me, whether bishops, priests, or any other disciples of Christ, want to be more than their teacher, because their teacher was poor.”

MARIITA: “At the Last Supper he began to serve them with an apron on to make them see that he was their servant. This way he tried to teach them that nobody should be the master of anybody else, but that we must all be servants of each other. That was his teaching.”

WILLIAM: “He was a carpenter like Jose Arana, and a man of the people. And anyone who wants to be above the people wants to be more than Jesus.”

OSCAR: “The studies will end in glory, in the other life. And then the disciples will be glorious like Christ, but only if they were equal to him in this life.”

JULIO, his brother: “It seems to me that studies are the awareness that we develop about equality, the conscientization, feeling that we're all equal. And at the end of the studies will come the glory, when all of us are going to be really equal.”

“Christ is equal to all of us, and there won't be teachers anymore because we'll all be equal to one another and also equal to Christ,” I said.

> *How can you see the mote in your brother's eye and not see the beam that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother: “Brother, let me remove the mote that is in your eye?” Hypocrite! First take out the beam from your eye and you will thus be able to see well to take out the mote from your brother's eye*.

DONALD: “You can always see clearly the evil in others and not the evil in yourself. But this is not seeing clearly. Because if you have a beam in your eye you're not seeing anything.”

OSCAR: You see the other person's error and not your own (or *my* own, I mean; why should I say ‘you’?). And that's an error that I commit. Maybe bigger than the error that I'm looking at. It's the same as I was saying before, about judging: the way I judge I'm judged. Because if I judge bad I make myself evil. Noticing somebody else's speck is judging him, is seeing him evil, and that makes me worse. Because I don't do it to reform him but because I think I'm better, and therefore I'm worse. I'm a blind man who wants to guide others when I have a beam in my eye and how am I going to remove a speck when I can't see…Well, I'm all mixed up, let somebody else talk.”

MANUEL: “The hypocrites are the Pharisees, right? And the Pharisees were the guides of the people, right? Then the blind guides are the hypocrites who want to reform others without reforming themselves. The disciples of Jesus may be Pharisees, and the revolutionaries may be Pharisees, if they don't criticize themselves.”

JULIO: “I've been talking against the rich, but I see that what's here can be applied to the poor as well: not to blame everything on the rich, because maybe the poor are just alike, except that they don't do some things because they can't. So first we ought to change ourselves so that later we can demand that the rich change themselves.”

WILLIAM: “This is an important call for self-criticism. Also for criticism, because you can remove the mote from your brother if your eye is clean. Here in the Youth Club there's a lot of criticism and self-criticism. After they've had a party, for instance, they examine what things were bad and what were good, what was positive and what was negative.”

“Is that all?”

“We've seen it all clearly,” said MILAGROS.

When the comments were over I informed them that we had learned that one of the people present in the church (Mario, the school-teacher) was a spy. We had also learned that his real name wasn't Mario and that he wasn't a teacher but a captain in the army. He changed color, protested with a lot of false starts that he was not a spy but a revolutionary. I insisted that we had proof. But that we were not judging him or condemning him.

FELIX said: “What does it matter if he's in the secret police, if that's how he earns his living? As long as he doesn't lie.”

MARIITA: “As long as he just says what he sees and hears. Because this is the Gospel, and we say it publicly.”

43.

The Tree Is Known by Its Fruits—and the Two Foundations

(Luke 6:43–49)

There is no good tree that can produce bad fruit; Nor is there a bad tree that can produce good fruit. For each tree is known by its fruits: you do not harvest figs from thorn trees, nor do you pick grapes from bramble bushes.

FELIPE: “Jesus says that people are like trees. Because people, like the trees, produce fruit. But the people who are good can't produce evil, and the people who are evil can't produce good. There is one way of knowing ourselves and it's by what we do. We may think we're good, but if we do evil we're evil. And people can say we're evil, but if we do good things we're good.”

My brother FERNANDO, who is a Jesuit and visiting with us now: “Which means that being and doing are the same thing and can't be separated. Or rather, what people are is known by what they do. And doing, it seems to me, is the same as the way you behave toward others. Depending on our relations with others, we are bourgeois or revolutionaries.”

REBECA: “People produce good fruits who do the will of God, which is love. And people who act in accordance with love can't produce bad fruit. And people who don't act the way God wants them to are people who act out of selfishness, and they can't produce good fruit.”

MARCELINO, Rebeca's husband: “We know plants. City people don't know them and often they can't tell a *zapote* from a *sonzapote*. And I think we

have to sort out people like we sort out trees. According to the Gospel there are two classes of people: good and evil. That's the same as saying: the just and the unjust, the exploited and the exploiters. And we *campesinos* have to be clear about which is which."

DONALD: "As I understand it, trees are only good or only bad. But it seems to me there are people who are half and half, who sometimes do good and sometimes do evil."

ADAN: "Selfish people never do good. And we see this in the rich. They don't have any good fruit. They always act according to their interests, and their interests are against us."

FELIPE: "Evil people, even though they act good, they do it bad, because what they do very well is doing evil. Or they do good to hide the evil, and we can't say that's good."

FELIX: "Evil people can do good things, too: for instance, a rich person who gives to charity."

JULIO: "If evil people do good deeds it's for their own interests. We think they're doing us good. They do good to get a double profit."

EDUARDO, the painter: "Maybe their gift to charity is money they took from somebody else."

REBECA, emphatically: "But the bad tree never gives good fruit. All year long it gives the same bad fruit. And if it's a good tree, all year long it gives good fruit."

ALEJO: "I understand this about trees. Trees can never change. The *jobo* will never give *jocotes*. But can't the evil person ever get to be good?"

I said that people can change and that that's what the Gospel talks most about: a change of attitude. In this we are different from trees. But we also see that, according to the Gospel, while we are good all our fruits will be good and while we are evil they will all be evil.

FERNANDO: "You could also say that in a good system everything is good and that in a bad system everything is bad. Capitalism can't produce good fruit because it's based on selfishness; it produces only exploitation. Some say that it's more important to change people than to change the system, but the truth is that there are many people who are individually good in a bad system and the system forces them to be evil. In a system of exploiters and exploited, many who don't want to be exploited are obliged to be exploiters. I think people are as important as the system, and both must change at the same time. The good system produces a new person, but that new society or

kingdom of heaven is not going to drop down from heaven. It's going to rise up out of our own depths, like a good fruit."

I said that Silverio only last Tuesday had gone to the San Carlos clinic because he had an earache, and at the Clinic they sold him a medicine (which they should sell at cost there) at a higher price than in the drugstore. A merchant commented that they did that only to the poor because they had no way to defend themselves, and that wealthy people got medicines cheap or for nothing. And I said that here we saw that in an evil system like ours even the good things (like clinics, hospitals, doctors, nurses, etc.) were all evil.

OLIVIA: "I like it that we're applying this overall, to society as a whole, about the tree and its fruits, and not in detail, to individual cases. Because the fruits of this society are very evil. Many, many people come down from the hills in poor health and they go back the way they came because they don't get cured in the clinic or the hospital, and those people have to go back home to die. And this isn't just in San Carlos; it's in the whole republic. Even if you beg him the doctor won't knock anything off the price of the medicine. But the rich who can afford to buy it get it free. Most poor people when they get sick have to die or stay sick. That's why we're all sick all the time."

WILLIAM: "And it seems to me that what Jesus is also telling us with this example about the laws of nature is that good and evil in people also obey the natural laws of history, which are also called the laws of historical materialism. The relationships of production in a given society will determine the spiritual fruits that are produced. For a system of exploitation to produce love among people is as unnatural as it is for thorn trees to produce figs."

> *The good man says good things because good is in his heart; and the evil man says evil things because evil is in his heart. For with his mouth he says what his heart is filled with.*

I said that it seemed like Jesus was talking about deeds (fruits) and now we see that he is referring to words. Can it be that he has changed the subject?

FELIPE: "Words are a kind of deed."

I asked if evil people couldn't say good things (politicians?), and an old man, DON JULIO CHAVARRIA, answered me: “Here he means good things that agree with the deeds. It's not a question of saying ‘I'm good, I'm good,’ and praising myself. Lies, falsehoods are not good. If a person is false, his words are lies because falsehood is in his heart, and the heart is all of him. If I have an evil heart, I have to say evil things.”

“Those evil things that evil people say and that come out of their hearts,” I said, “are what exploitation is, like the words with which they sold Silverio that medicine, like all the words of business and the banks and the newspapers and the capitalist radios, and like the laws, the court sentences, and the orders to jail and to shoot.”

COSME the boatman asked: “And how about those people that all they do is repeat these Scripture words but don't live them?”

“They are talked about right here in this Gospel,” said GLORIA, and she read the following verse:

Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and you don't do what I tell you?

ALEJANDRO said: “Those are the Christians that we've had for so long, the Christians that are religious but don't live the Gospel.”

FERNANDO: “It spoke earlier of the good words that spring from the good heart. These words don't spring from the heart, because they're not true, or better, they spring from an evil heart. It spoke earlier about the true words that are like good fruits, that are words that are translated into action. And now it wants to distinguish them from those other words, like the ‘Lord, Lord,’ which are straight formula and religious ritualism. In another passage Jesus has said that it won't be the ones that say, ‘Lord, Lord,’ who will enter the kingdom of heaven; it'll be the ones that do the will of the Father. That means the ones who will be saved aren't necessarily the religious ones but the ones who fulfill that will, which is love.”

FELIPE: “Talking without doing anything is no good for anything.”

I said: “The word is heard in order to carry it out. ‘Do for others what you want them to do for you,’ according to Jesus, is the summary of the word of God (the Law and the Prophets). And saying, ‘Lord, Lord,’ seems to be praying, and also confessing that Jesus is God, for in Greek the word ‘Lord’ (*Kyrie*) also means God, and the first recognition that was made of the divinity of Christ, after his resurrection, was to apply to him the word

Kyrie (Lord). But according to Jesus, neither invoking him nor believing in his divinity (‘believing in Christ,’ as we say) brings us salvation, but instead it's doing what he says. And this ‘Lord, Lord,’ reminds us also of those virgins who got left out of the wedding feast and according to the Gospel in Greek, what they were crying was *Kyrie! Kyrie!”*

LAUREANO: “Really to believe in Christ is not to believe he's God but to do what he says, whether we believe or don't believe he's God.”

> *The man who comes to me and listens to me and does what I say, I will show you what he is like: He is like a man who built a house, but first he dug very deep and laid the foundation upon the rock…. But the one who listens to me and does not do what I say is like a man who built his house on the ground, without a foundation; and when the river rose and beat against it, it collapsed and great was the ruin of that house.*

FERNANDO: “Jesus divides people into two classes, not into believers and atheists, but into those who act and those who don't act. We could also say: those who love and those who don't love. And I remember now what the Apostle Saint James says: We must be ‘doers of the word,’ because the one who only listens to the word ‘is deceiving himself.’ Carrying out the word, according to Jesus, is building upon rock. In the Old Testament God was called ‘Rock,’ because rock is strong and with it walls and fortresses are built. In the New Testament Jesus is also called ‘Rock,’ and here he is telling us what that rock really is. The rock is love.”

OSCAR: “A house is to live in together, united, the whole family (this occurs to me now that I'm building my farmhouse). But false religion can't be that house we all live in, because it has false foundations, it's doomed to disappear; it's not going to last long.”

MIGUEL: “I think it's already falling down…”

LAUREANO: “The shifting earth that house was built on is like our class society.”

ALEJANDRO: “Doctrine alone, the knowledge of Jesus’ words, the Bible itself: These are things that have no value by themselves. Building just on that is building on the surface. You have to build on actions, on love put into practice: the praxis of love.”

WILLIAM: “And I think it can also be interpreted this way: that we can't build a just social system based only on ideas or doctrines (as we Christians have often believed). We have to base it on material realities, what Marxists call the infrastructure, which is the way we produce bread, clothes, houses. We first have to create a fair infrastructure, brotherly economic relations among people, so that the superstructure (things like ideas, philosophy, morals) will also be good. Otherwise the whole structure will go down the drain, which is what will happen with today's society. The river that overflowed was the current of history, which is also called the revolution. The man who built that house without a foundation also failed to notice that he was near a river.”

FERNANDO: “And what he says at the end, that the ruin was very great, reminds me of the experience we've just gone through in the great Managua earthquake. Then we saw not just that there were many badly built houses but that the whole structure of society was badly built, based only on profit and selfishness, and that's why the ruin was so great. Even the foundations of the houses were weak because the whole of society was based on exploitation. And there were people who owned forty, fifty, eighty houses, and in twenty seconds they lost them. The moral ruin of those people was also very great, because they had based their happiness on those riches. The same thing will happen when the revolution comes, with all those who have built their lives on false bases.”

FELIPE: “And at the hour of the earthquake maybe those people were saying: ‘Lord, Lord!’”

I said that a friend told me that at the time of the earthquake many people who had never prayed went down on their knees to pray in the streets, while the authentic Christians didn't pray: They were busy helping others. I asked if anyone had any other comment to make. After a silence, someone answered: “Nobody.”

44.

The Multiplication of the Loaves

(Luke 9:10–17)

Night was approaching. Jesus had been talking all day about the kingdom of God. The apostles said to him:

> *Dismiss the people, so that they can go and rest and get food in the villages and the neighboring towns, for here where we are there is nothing*.

OLIVIA: “Jesus was pleased to have those humble people with him listening to his word and that's why he hadn't wanted to send them away. Maybe he didn't want them to give too much importance to food, more importance than to his word. And those people who had gone to seek him probably weren't thinking of food. Maybe they didn't even feel hungry hearing his word.”

JULIO MAIRENA: “The apostles think there isn't any food, and it seems to me that that's the way we are now. We all say we don't have any food. But it seems to me that the problem isn't that there's no food. It's that a few people have it all. If it was all shared around we'd all be eating what those few who have the food are now eating, and I think we'd all have enough.”

ALEJANDRO: “That's very good, what Julio says, and it's very important for everyone to realize this everywhere (I don't know if everyone here understood it clearly): that by sharing it, there's enough for everyone. Because the order that he gives them is to share, right?”

But Jesus said to them: "Give them food." They said to him: "We have only five loaves and two fishes unless we go and buy food for all these people." For there were about five thousand men. But Jesus said to his disciples: "Make them sit in groups of about fifty."

PANCHO: "I'm just catching on to what this means here! They didn't have enough—right?—to feed the five thousand people. But then he says to them: It doesn't matter, share it. And there was more than enough! He made them understand that no matter how little they had they had to share it. And they shared it, and with his power he made it stretch out. The lesson is that no matter how little we have we always have to give."

MARCELINO: "Jesus also teaches us that with a little we can do a lot. He doesn't look down on poverty; he uses it to change it into riches. He didn't want to make a miracle without using anything. He didn't say: 'Hell, with those rolls and those herring you can't do anything!' No, he took them and shared them so we could see that with just a little we can do a lot. Here in Solentiname what do we have? A little corn and some fish…. But we can make a miracle."

FELIPE: "The teaching is also that if we come together to hear the message we're not going to be hungry, because with a united people there are no problems. Maybe I won't have food, but my neighbor will. If we're together something can happen to us like what happened to those people with Jesus Christ. If we're together it doesn't hurt to share. And then we're practicing the message of God."

I said: "Felipe and his comrades have just joined in a little 'commune' to work the land in common and to live owning everything in common. They have found that this is better than the earlier Cooperative. And they are really giving us an example of what ought to be done in this country and in all of Latin America, because this is the message of God, as he says."

ALEJANDRO: "As I see it, the same thing didn't happen to Jesus that almost always happens to the church: that it's nothing but words. That we must do good and all that. But when people are hungry, nothing is done to solve the problem. Christ not only uses words, talking to them all day about the kingdom of God, but he feeds them through his disciples. He doesn't send them away hungry. Christ's Gospel also feeds you. But many bishops and priests think it's only to save your soul and not to change the economic situation of society."

MANUEL (who is also in the new “commune”): “He divided them into groups so there'd be organization, so there wouldn't be abuses, so everyone could eat and so there'd be enough for everyone.”

FELIPE: “It seems that's a fundamental teaching that he gives us: that that's the way the world ought to be. That that's what his followers ought to do when he has gone, that we ought to organize ourselves in communities.”

JULIO MAIRENA, who is not in the “commune” but is their guest: “If the whole country was organized like that in communities, not just fifties but thousands, it would be very different, I tell you.”

ALEJANDRO, who is the leader of these boys: “He tells it to his disciples because the ones that are most aware are the ones that have to give to others. And they have to be generous and not worry about whether they have or don't have or how much they have but give all they have as was done in this case.”

FELIPE: “A lot of people think things are the way they are because God wants them to be that way. He made people rich and poor, and until he wants it nothing's going to change. That's what they say when we talk to them about socialism. And that's not true. He's given us the order to change things. We have to feed the hungry, and God will give us the power to make miracles as he gave it to his disciples.”

OLIVIA: “I find that all Christ's words and deeds were to teach us about life. Here he shows us that we all must do the sharing and make the increase of the five loaves that were so few, and that is to share love. Julio said it very well: Food and medicine are abundant in the underdeveloped countries, but in the hands of the poor nothing is abundant, and that's because love is lacking. The first thing is education, as Fidel says, the education of the people so that with education we can receive knowledge, and transmit it to others. And I see now that if we have that knowledge with love, then there is food, there are medicines for everyone. In these countries people die because of lack of food and medicine. The poor people don't have them due to lack of love. When there is brotherhood among everybody, it seems to me that then the miracle will occur, and then nobody will be in need of anything, because the people will be giving things through love. And that is what Christ wants, that is the kingdom of God.”

ESPERANCITA, Olivia's daughter, pregnant with her first child: “The thing about the fish, Ernesto, and the loaves that were so small and they increased and got bigger, right?: that can also be a community that's born tiny and

grows and gets to be big because inside it consciousness is growing and love is growing and it gets to be the size of the whole country. I see that in the number of loaves and fishes that it says."

> *Then Jesus took the five loaves and the two fishes. Looking up to heaven he gave thanks to God and after dividing them up he gave them to his disciples so that they could share them among the people*.

ALEJANDRO: "Applying it to the country, I see it this way: It's like a person that comes and says to us: 'Look how the people are starving to death and there's a little social class that's got everything.' And then all you have to do is take action."

WILLIAM: "This has always been called the Miracle of the Multiplication of the Loaves, but I see that the Gospel doesn't mention multiplication or miracle. It just says that they shared them. Then Alejandro's applying it to the country isn't as symbolic as you might think. It must be that there was bread for everyone, man, and it was all in the hands of four or five bastards. The miracle was to persuade the owners of the bread to share it, that it was absurd for them to keep it all while the people were going hungry."

I said: "Could it be, then, that the apostles distributed that little bit that they had, and loaves began to come forth, and some people began to pull other things out of their pockets and bags, and there was enough for everybody, and even some left over?"

TERESITA: "Land reform is a sharing like the sharing of the loaves: A piece of land that isn't producing much is divided up and changed into great wealth that gives to everybody."

OLIVIA: "Where they have land reform, not like here where all the good land belongs to the big landowners and they won't give it up. They offer you mudholes, bogs that are no good for anything. But if there's land reform in a country, that's a miracle, a sharing of loaves."

I said that it has always been pointed out that the words used here are identical with those used at the Last Supper: "Jesus took the bread in his hands, gave thanks to God and after breaking it he gave it to his disciples."

DONALD: "It seems like he wanted to remind them of what he'd already done before, and he wanted to make them see it was the same thing. The only difference is that that time, the last time, was for them alone, while the other time the Gospel says: 'He gave them to his disciples so that they

could share them.’ But now also he's giving that bread so they'll share it with others, and so they'll show the others what he had done before. Because at that moment with so many people, the people weren't going to catch on to what he did, and many of the people who got the food maybe didn't even find out how it happened. He wanted this to sink in, that last time.”

WILLIAM: “But continuing with the supposition that there was a distribution of what was owned by certain people, who were persuaded that they ought to share with the rest, and knowing that at the Last Supper he gave thanks for his self-giving to others, and for the self-giving of his disciples: We can suppose that the first time he also gave thanks for that other self-giving and for the sharing that was done there, everybody dividing up their food in common. He gave thanks, then, for that communion.”

I said that Eucharist is a Greek word that means “to give thanks.” If you go to Greece you find that the word used in the street to say thanks is *Eukaristo*. I said also that in the Bible to give thanks to God, to praise God, or to bless God is all the same and that's why in the Gospel it says alternately that Jesus at the Last Supper, with the bread and the wine, “gave thanks” or “blessed.” In the Bible those thanks or praises or blessings were generally for a liberating action of God, of the Yahweh that always appeared as Liberation, and they were in the form of poems or songs: It was like singing of liberation. And at that supper for five thousand people, the thanksgiving, as William said, was the same as at the last one because of the same liberating event of God, the manifestation of God as the union and communion of all people. In this supper Jesus broke the bread and divided it so that all could share it, so that all could be in a common union or communion. He said later, at the other supper, that the bread was his body. His body was that communion. When we are all united in communion we are Jesus. In this Gospel that we're hearing it says that earlier Jesus had been talking to them all day about the kingdom of God. He must have been talking, I think, about that communion of all people: “The kingdom of God is like a banquet…”

> *All ate and were filled; and afterwards they filled twelve baskets with the bits that were left.*

OSCAR: “When there is a true community there is equality among everybody. Everybody ate the same, everybody was filled. That ought to happen in our country. In our country there are a lot of us who are hungry. Nobody would have to be hungry if everything in the country belonged to everybody. But here things are the way the devil wants them to be. The devil, who is the Evil One, wants us to be split apart, each one separated by selfishness. But if we all organize the way God wants, I'm sure that nobody would go hungry, because there's enough of everything in the country. There's plenty of food.”

OLIVIA: “There'd be not just food left over, like there was there, but medicine, too. But now there are so many of us who are sick, and even dying, because there are no medicines to heal the poor. There are lots of medicines in the country. But they're in the hospitals. For poor people there are no medicines. They won't give them.”

FELIPE: “I think that in our country there's plenty, plenty of everything. In our country there's food, there's clothing, there's medicine, there's everything you can want, there's enough. What's wrong is that people have all that stuff not to share but to sell. And the ones that have the things want them to be scarce to earn more even though the people are starving. If you put an end to selfishness there'll be plenty of everything. There'll be education, housing, and produce, a whole lot of eggs, a whole lot of milk and meat, and there'll be lots of teachers, doctors, nurses, facilities so that kids can study for the professions they want. It'll be the multiplication of the loaves and of everything.”

REBECA: “He was showing them what love could do in the world, that everybody would have enough. Through his miracle there was enough for everyone, everyone ate, and there was some left over. And that would be the miracle that love would perform in the world. Instead of the situation that we're in, when one person eats and the other doesn't. Selfishness is to blame for the scarcity of everything. Through love there'll be abundance for everybody. He performed that miracle so that we could see what love can do.”

I said: “On several occasions the Gospel tells us that the disciples ‘had not understood’ about the loaves. We may ask: What hadn't they understood? It couldn't be that they had not understood that it was a miracle, because they did take it as a miracle. It seems to me that perhaps they ‘had not understood’ because they understood it only as a miracle to

feed many people (and as it has frequently continued to be understood) and not as a communion that had taken place there, and a communication of wealth, a distribution of things held in common. This was also a likeness of the community that we shall be in the future, when we shall all be one and all things shall be in common. In Greek there is a single word, *koinonia*, for the Eucharistic communion and for the communion of wealth, the commonwealth, and it's because for the first Christians the two things were the same. Saint Paul says that to place wealth in common is the sacrifice that pleases God, and that is like saying that perfect communism is the true Eucharist. It seems to me that that is why Christ gave thanks or praised or blessed God when he gave out those loaves and when he communicated to us his love and his self-giving together with those loaves, as William says. We have spoken here of community and communion and communication of wealth and commune and communism. What all this means (and this is what the disciples probably didn't understand) is that we are called upon to form a humanity with a unity of people, a society in the image of the Trinity.”

45.

The Mother and the Brothers of Jesus

(Mark 3:31–35)

We read that Jesus was talking to the people and they told him that his mother and brothers were outside and were looking for him.

> *But he said to them: Who are my mother and my brothers? Then, looking at all those who were seated around him, he said: "These are my mother and my brothers. Because anyone who does the will of God, that one is my brother, my sister, and my mother."*

ESPERANZA, who had just married, said: "He wants us to love everyone the same as we love our family. The ones that were inside with him were like his family. He doesn't want us to devote ourselves just to our own families but to treat everyone the same."

TOMAS: "That means that he wasn't with his family. It seems to me that he was far away from them. And his mother wasn't with him, see? So she came to look for him with all his brothers. When they notified him, then, he certainly sent for her so she could be with him. It seems to me that's the way it must have been. As soon as they arrived I suppose he must have said that they should ask her to come in. She'd stayed outside the church, so to speak, because they were gathered like us here. She hadn't come in. That's why someone told him they were there. And then he probably made them all come in to be together, she and all his brothers together with the ones that were already inside, all together like a single family. And so they'd all be gathered there. Like in this place right here where we are, we're all one,

don't you think? That's what I think he explained to them when his family came to speak with him."

OLIVIA: "I see one thing very clearly and that is that it's not enough to hear God's message; we have to put it into practice. Everybody who works for the common good of all, that's who is a brother and a mother of Christ."

And ALEJANDRO, her son: "There's a good lesson here for us, who are so very close to our families. There are people who are always defending their family, even though it does something bad, right?—just because it's their family. And it shouldn't be like that. You can have a relative who's a son-of-a-bitch. And sometimes you're more of a brother to a stranger that maybe you just met, than to your real brother who is very alienated."

FELIPE, Tomas's son: "It seems to me he meant that his mother and his relatives were the same to him as the people who were around him and followed him. All of them were for him equally a single family."

MANUELITO: "And there was no need for him to go to see his family who were outside, because the ones who were inside were also his family. It's as though he said: 'My family are here too, and I can't leave them.'"

GUILLERMO: "And I believe Christ sees that the ones that are inside there with him are exposing themselves to danger with him. And that's why he says, looking at the people who are seated around him: 'These are fulfilling the will of God; they're in this struggle with me too.'"

LAUREANO: "Jesus has a very revolutionary attitude here I believe, because every revolutionary has to break loose from his family. We have the example of Che. His family was living in Argentina and he was fighting in Cuba. Those people were his brothers too."

I remembered what had already been said on another occasion about Che: that a woman once wrote him from Spain asking him if they were relatives, because she was a Guevara. And he answered that anyone who took to heart any injustice committed anywhere in the world was his brother.

And GLORIA (who is also a Guevara) said: "He spoke there like Jesus."

I said we could think also that some of those brothers of Jesus who came looking for him were alienated people. Why not? He could have had cruddy relatives, too, couldn't he?

ALEJANDRO, Gloria's brother: "He probably had some."

I said there was a passage in Saint John where Jesus' brothers insisted that he go to Jerusalem to get publicity, and John added: "The truth is that

not even his brothers believed in him.” And Mark had said they thought he was crazy.

GUILLERMO: “Many of those people who were his family were the ones who afterwards left him alone, dying, covered with flies.”

And another Guevara (DONALD, brother of Alejandro and Gloria): “Here he also shows them that the family is not just a single thing. We usually think that the family is only one, we can only have one family. But there can be many other people that you're united with, and they're family too. But not everyone, right? Because there are some bastards that, even though they're your blood brothers, they're not in any way united with you. He makes us see that our family can become bigger. One of us will maybe go somewhere else, and the family will say: ‘He left us all alone here.’ And he goes off to do something for other brothers. The way Che left his land and went off to Cuba and left his family, and maybe a girl in tears, and who knows what else. And maybe they thought he was goofing off, wasting his time. But you see what he went off to do. He did for other people even more than what you do for your family.”

And OLIVIA, the mother of Gloria, Donald and Alejandro: “It seems as though he's telling us that we're all one family. When we all struggle for a common ideal for everyone, that's a single family. Christ really came to create a single family, and what has divided us is selfishness, sin. Everyone who does the will of his Father, that man is his brother, that woman is his mother. But if I'm a bad woman, I don't want my children to see me as their mother. If I do evil, I want their family to be people who work for the good of all.”

FELIPE: “He thought, it seems to me, that the people who were close by him needed him more than his mother and his brothers. Maybe they wanted to see him just to say hello to him and chew the fat, asking him how he was doing and how he was feeling. He preferred people who needed more. And I believe that now that's what we have to do, because at times parents maybe need less than other people from other families who don't belong to you at all. And they're our brothers too.”

I said that it seemed that this happened in “the house” of which at other times the Gospel spoke, the house of the community of Jesus. And this reminds me of some young people in Managua who left their families to live in a separate community (like the community of Father Molina and Fernando, my brother). Some of them came from very rich families and left

home because they didn't agree with that life and that mentality. They have gone to another family, the family that Jesus said were his mother and his brothers.

WILLIAM: “And when they rejected their families they also rejected their class. What Jesus says about families must also be understood about class ties.”

CESAR: “Here we see that it's his blood brothers and his mother who arrive. But he says that they aren't his family, that his family are the ones who are with him fighting for the cause for which he is fighting.”

TERESITA: “He didn't say: ‘This isn't my family.’ Because the Virgin was always a revolutionary. She was also his family. He wasn't excluding Mary, his mother.”

OLIVIA: “What it means is that he's as interested in those people as much as in his mother. His mother and his brothers were outside like the other people he was conscientizing there. And she didn't resent that because she wasn't selfish. She didn't want her son all for herself. And we, even we poor are often selfish. We often want our children to devote themselves exclusively to us. And the rich are so selfish that even though their children are rich, they leave them their wealth when there's so much poverty everywhere.”

I said that some thought that maybe Mary and the relatives came to dissuade him, to tell him not to get mixed up in all this. The Gospel really doesn't say why they arrived.

OLIVIA: “Maybe they just wanted to look at him, to see him. Because he was far away, as Tomas says. Or maybe to listen to the doctrine he was preaching.”

“The Gospel says ‘they had him called,’” someone added.

ALEJANDRO: “They sure were screwed up…. It was a strange arrival. Maybe there's something of this in reality. I'd never thought of it.”

I said that Jesus had said that it would be necessary to abandon father and mother and brothers, and he was the first one to give us an example. And also Mary may have come to where Jesus was to tell him not to get involved. There's nothing bad in a mother's acting that way. It was a natural thing for a mother to do (and perhaps the other relatives urged her to go with them). But she would understand his words and would see that he was right. Just as every revolutionary mother understands her revolutionary son.

Another said: “As I see it, Jesus is also trying to make us see that we are all a single family. He says: ‘I believe that we are all a single family…’”

And another: “Not all. He doesn't say that all are his family, everybody. Just the ones who do the will of his father.”

REBECA: “Those who love are the family of Jesus.”

46.

The Lamp

(Mark 4:21–25)

This Gospel we heard at a Mass on Mancarroncito, the last and most remote island of the Solentiname Archipelago. The Mass was at the home of Doña Yoya, under an arbor. Facing us, a blue cove. Far away, in the middle of the lake, the small, solitary island of Zanata, and farther away, as if emerging from the water, the two volcanoes of the large island of Ometepe. We came to say Mass at Mancarroncito because it is far removed from the rest of the archipelago, and those who live there, very poor and with very few boats, can seldom get to our little church.

> *He also said to them: Does anyone bring a lamp to put it under a bushel or under the bed? No, the lamp is put up high, where it will give light.*

I explained that 'bushel' was a basket to measure grain, like what Nicaraguan farmers call a *medio* or a *cuartillo*.

FELIX said: "I think the Gospel is a very high doctrine that God has offered to humanity to give us all light. That's why it's like a raised lamp."

Someone from Mancarroncito: "Jesus never went around hiding. That's the light on high. And we have to be like that, too. Not hide with the truth but bring it out into the light."

JULIO MAIRENA: "People who have hidden justice are the ones who hide the light. Christ came for the poor. But often the priests, because they're getting the money of the rich, have hidden this message for the poor. And that's the light under the bushel, under the grain basket. There are others

who, through fear of the powerful, apply the Gospel only to their private lives, and that's the light under the bed, it seems to me. The one who raises the light high is the one who protests against injustice."

FELIPE: "Not only the priests. We also hide the light. We also have the duty to preach the truth, and many times we don't speak it out of fear. And we have to speak the truth, even though they threaten us, or attack us, or kill us, as has always happened with the prophets."

ALEJANDRO: "We have come now to have this meeting on Mancarroncito Island and to comment here on the Gospel. And I see this as bringing out the lamp so it will shine. People from here will also mobilize for other places, for somewhere else, carrying that light that we always have to bring out from under the bushel. Bring it out so that it will shine for everyone."

REBECA said: "The lamp is Christ. Because he said: 'I am the light.' Anyone who reads the Gospel and then hides the book in a drawer is hiding the light. Anyone who reads it and then tells about it to someone else is bringing out the light so it can be communicated to another neighbor. And that's the way Christ's word is communicated, like a light from which you light another light."

FELIPE: "We make that light shine with friendship, making one island friendly with another. Putting an end to the separation and the isolation that there is on our islands. This light will give good light when we feel ourselves all united like a single island. We transmit the light to each other with friendship, with union. We communicate Christ when we communicate friendship. The light, then, is love."

OLIVIA: "Yes, when we're isolated we don't communicate the message of the Gospel, which is a message of unity, of brotherhood. We brothers and sisters have to form a community of love. They followed Christ. He preached and there were crowds who followed him and there was a lot of love there among them. And we are gathered together here illuminated by that Gospel."

> *Well, nothing of what is hidden will remain uncovered; and there is no secret that will not be revealed. You who have ears, listen.*

JULIO: "It seems to me that this has now been fulfilled. The priests used to read the Gospel in Latin, and they said things nobody could understand.

But now many of us are clear about what the Gospel means and about what we're looking for: What we're looking for is to be equal."

I said: "In reality this was the great secret that had to be made public at some time. The Gospel was revolutionary, but what was revolutionary and subversive in it was kept hidden for a long time."

OSCAR: "Christianity means sincerity, to be clean, to love without hypocrisy. Being revolutionary is putting an end to lying. That's why Christ came, so nothing would be hidden. So there would be light. Now society lives with falseness and lies, like somebody that has their lamp underneath the bed."

> *Pay attention to what you hear. The same measure that you use to measure, God will use it to measure you also; and he will give even more to you who hear. For to him who has will be given more; but from him who has not will be taken even the little that he has*.

FELIX: "Can that be fair? I don't understand why that's so. I want it explained."

Old TOMAS PEÑA: "It seems to me that those who have, who are the rich, God gives them more so they'll increase their capital, which for them is their life and their glory. And he gives it to them to ruin them. And he is going to take from the poor even the little they have so as to give them true glory. Because the poor are the ones who are going to follow him. That's what he's trying to make clear, it seems to me."

FELIPE, his son: "I think just a little different. People who are stuck on money have no belief in God even though they think they do. God's going to take away from these guys what little belief they have in him, the tiny bit of love of God. The ones that have, and that receive even more, are the ones that love. These God is surely going to fill more with love."

Several people said they liked what Felipe had said, that it was true. OLIVIA commented: "That's the way I understand it. It seems to me that the ones who have the most love, more love will be given to them. And the ones who have little love, all love will be taken away from them. They will be separated from humanity so they don't get in its way."

And one of the young people from Mancarroncito: "As I understand it, the ones who don't have any love here on earth have nothing even though

they think they do. But anyone who has love is rich, and they'll be given more. I think that's the way it is, right?”

An old man from this island: “Those who are generous, with every service they do to others they get richer in their generosity. They become more generous. And those who have nothing of that get poorer and poorer. Those who are cruel, with each cruelty they get crueler and crueler.”

FELIX MAYORGA: “The rich have a saying: Money creates money. And it's true that the richer you are, the more money you make. And what about us? The poorer the *campesinos* are, the poorer their harvests are. We not only don't earn, we lose. So the rich get richer and richer, and the poor get poorer. That must seem like an injustice but that's the way it is. And the kingdom of heaven is also like that, as I see it.”

JULIO: “He has said that, with the same *cuartillo* or the same *medio* that we measure with, we're going to be measured, and that we'll be given even more. He means that the love that we give we receive, and we receive even more. And also the hatred or the cruelty that we give, we receive that, and we receive even more.”

OLIVIA: “He also says that people who have ears should hear. The ones who listen are the ones who already have some love in their hearts, and they're given more love. The ones who don't listen (because they have nothing) will lose what little they had. That's why the ones who have the most love will increase their love, and the selfish ones will become more miserable.”

I said that we had clearly seen that just as money creates more money love creates more love and selfishness creates more selfishness. I also said that this light that today's Gospel speaks of is the light we have brought to Mancarroncito, and it's the same one that has illuminated us in this reading. With this light things have emerged that were hidden, what was hidden in the Gospel has been revealed to us.

OSCAR: “That is clear. It's coming out, we're all seeing what was hidden.”

The noonday sun blazed in the sky. The lake was an intense blue. Some distance away, a little sail boat. And in the background, the distant volcanoes of the Island of Ometepe.

47.

The Growing Seed

(Mark 4:26–29)

We commented on this Gospel in the meeting house, after a lunch of steamed fish wrapped in banana leaves, cooked by Doña Angela, and breadfruit that Octavio brought from the huge breadfruit tree on Stork Island.

> *The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the ground; he goes off to sleep afterwards and later he gets up, and days and nights pass, and the seed blooms and grows, without his knowing how.*

LAUREANO: “When equality reigns among all people, that will be the kingdom of God.”

REBECA, Marcelino's wife: “Equality will reign through love, because the kingdom of God is love. Then everybody will be one. There will be no inequality or injustice, and love will grow and grow. And the more love there is the more people will love each other and join together and be united. Love is like the seed planted on good land. It grows and grows all by itself.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me, Ernesto, that that business about a man sowing a seed in the earth and the seed blooms and grows all by itself is that Jesus Christ sowed love in us. Now the rest is up to us. We're the earth, and it's up to us to see that love blooms and grows and bears fruit.”

MANUEL: “The sower fell asleep. It seems like Jesus Christ died and doesn't exist now. It's like he's sleeping. But the seed is in us and we have to

harvest it.”

MARCELINO, who, like almost all of these *campesinos*, has just sown his late corn: “It's like he's washed his hands of it already. Like the man who sowed his corn well, and now he doesn't have any reason to worry any more.”

FELIPE: “It's the earth that has to take charge of that now. And the weather—the sun, the rain.”

“Which is like saying people and history,” I said.

REBECA: “The ‘days’ and the ‘nights’ it seems to me are the time he's giving for the kingdom to develop. He came to die, to give us an example, and he already showed what we were all going to do. And the harvest will be when he comes to raise up all his people, a united society.”

QUIQUE: “I think that business about the sower going off to sleep—maybe Jesus said it because it's a thing the church has often done: lie down to sleep, because the kingdom of heaven is going to have to come. And it doesn't do anything else—except wait for it to come.”

I asked what else the sower could do, once the seed was sown. He answered: “Put fertilizer on it, weed it.”

LAUREANO: “That doesn't cut the time. What that does is give good fruit.”

OSCAR: “But I agree with Quique, because if I've sown the seed and I go off to sleep, I lose it. Even though it grows and grows, the weeds grow up too, and then I can lose my crop.”

LEONEL: “Maybe Jesus isn't talking about a crop that's neglected, but a good crop, grown as it ought to be, one that lets the worker have some rest. The man does his work and after that he has nothing else to do except wait. And the crop doesn't stop on account of that. It goes on all by itself.”

> *It is because the earth produces by itself; first comes the stalk, then the ear, then the grains that fill the ear*.

Others commented: “The kingdom at first was hidden, like a seed in the earth. Later it came up weak, like a little stalk. Afterwards there are communities, which are the ears. The communities afterwards are going to be a well-nourished people. Those are the ears that are filling out.”

“But look, just because the seed that is love was sown and there is a community, does that mean we should go to sleep? We've got to be alert so there'll be more produce. I get up early to look at my seed.”

“You sowed it, and afterwards now you can't do anything to make it bud or grow. It's the earth that takes charge of that. You just take care of it, and when it's night time of course you go to sleep. That's just what Jesus Christ did. He sowed his word for us, and now it's up to us—the people, who are the earth—to make it go on growing and bring in the harvest, which is going to be that great community.”

“It will come about anyway even though lots of people don't want that kingdom?”

OLIVIA: “I think it will, even though there are people who are against it. The kingdom of love and justice has to come; it's inevitable.”

I said: “Like a natural phenomenon, that's what this parable says. That just as the plant is produced from the seed, so from the words of Christ this kingdom on earth will be produced.”

“I believe, Ernesto, that the ones that don't want the kingdom of Christ to be established must be the weeds that don't let the plant grow.”

“The weeds or the selfishness that's in people. But these weeds will be pulled up little by little, and love will win out over selfishness.”

“That's what I say, because look, Jesus Christ planted the seed and it's up to him to pull up anything that's hurting it. But the growth depends on us, because the kingdom won't be made by him. It will be shaped by us, in our own persons.”

REBECA: “Love is triumphing over selfishness. And in the world, love, which is small at first, becomes big in time.”

QUIQUE: “And this Gospel also gives us a lot of hope, because we see that they kill so many who are struggling for justice to triumph in the world and they put an end to the groups. But Jesus tells us that justice is going to triumph.”

I said: “And I too find this very encouraging, because it often seems to us that the kingdom takes a long time to come and Jesus tells us here that this is a necessary delay, like that of every natural process. In nature everything takes its time, whether it's the formation of the stars in the sky or the transformation of the plants and the animals, and often they are very long times. This is what we call evolution, which is slow but it is also certain and goes toward a goal. And it seems to me that in this parable it is not only telling us that the kingdom of heaven is like a natural process but that it is a part of that same slow process of the evolution of the whole universe and that its development is the development of nature and human

beings themselves. That's why we can also say that the kingdom is within us, and within us it is growing and growing. Its development is everything that improves and progresses in the world. And we can also say, as Olivia said, that this kingdom is inevitable, because the world simply *has* to improve and progress. It's a natural law. And the kingdom is a process for the future, but as a process it is already present.

> *And when the grain is ripe they go out to gather it, for the day of the harvest has come*.

Several people commented: “Anyone that has worked in the fields knows very well when the grain is ripe and you have to get ready to harvest it. So also Jesus will know when conditions are right for the kingdom. It's a time that can't be advanced, but it can't be delayed either.”

“It seems to me that when the grain is ripe is when the people are bringing about the new society of justice. There's a need for union, for us all to get together, to bring this about. When everybody is together, the grain is ripe and it has to be harvested. Everybody together harvests it. The sower is just one man. It says: ‘A man casts seed upon the ground’ but at the end it says that ‘they go out’ to gather it.”

“Because it was Christ who spread the seed, and all of us, the people, together with him, go out to gather it. A man goes alone to sow, but if the harvest is large he can't gather it alone. We might say that the harvesting is done by Christ with all the others, Christ and the people. And the harvest is love and the unity of all of us.”

“A united people, a community with an awakened consciousness, is already becoming a ripe harvest.”

“I think it was in Cuba that the first harvest was gathered.”

I said: “They are in that process of the ripening of the first ears. It's not that the kingdom of God has already been established, which is the ‘kingdom of freedom’ that Che yearned for. That will come when there is no longer any selfishness. But one day a society without selfishness will come into existence, as all revolutionaries know who fight for it even though they are not Christians. And we Christians know it too if we believe in the Gospel. Here in this parable we are told that, no matter what happens, that kingdom is going to be established, because the seed was sown and the earth produces all by itself.”

OSCAR said: “People who believe that that society will be produced, because they have faith in others, it seems to me that even though they don't read the Gospel those people are true Christians.”

And I: “Seeing that the world has continued to be full of injustice, we may think that Jesus hasn't sown anything, or that he is a sower who has neglected his crop. In fact his church has often gone to sleep. But he tells us that the plant will not go on growing, perhaps through the action of those who are outside the church. And the fact that ‘the earth produces by itself’ perhaps means precisely that—that humanity by itself develops love, that it is a property of the earth that the seed grows. The only thing that was needed was for love to be planted in it, and it was planted. Any other comments?”

FELIPE: “I think everything is clear.”

48.

Jesus Calms the Storm

(Mark 4:35–41)

These February days are very windy, and from inside the church, where we are gathered, we hear a lot of noise from the lake. This Sunday's Gospel is very important to us because three days ago Ivan, Bosco, and their mother had their boat capsize. They spent more than two hours out in the middle of the lake, clinging to the overturned boat, until they were rescued. The boat was found this morning near the house of Tomas Peña.

We read that at nightfall Jesus told his disciples to take him in a boat to the other side of the lake. Some other boats went with them.

> *And a very strong wind arose and the waves got into the boat, so that they were getting wet. Jesus was asleep in the stern, with his head on a pillow. Waking him up, they said: "Master! Don't you care if we're sinking?" Then Jesus got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea: "Silence! Be calm!" And the wind was calm and everything was left completely still.*

I said by way of introduction: "I have read that on the Sea of Galilee, as on our lake, the rainstorms are heavy but they stop very quickly. According to the Gospel, Jesus had been teaching all day from a boat. It must have been in that same boat that they crossed the lake. The other boats probably belonged to the people who had been listening to them and who were returning to their homes. Mark says that it was already night. We can imagine that Jesus would have been very tired, and that's why he fell asleep even though the lake was so stormy."

One of the boys: “They must have been old boats, poor people's boats, and I'll bet poorly caulked.”

And another (making us laugh): “Like Cosme Canales’ boat.”

NATALIA: “Faith is what's important. I'm thinking of that boat that sank here—the anguish of that lady in those huge waves. And I think she can't even swim, the same as me because even though I live here I don't know how to swim. It must be frightening, don't you think, to fall into the water in the middle of the lake, without knowing how to swim. And worse if you're fat, or even if you're thin. But you can have a great faith. Just as this lady, I'm sure, had great faith. Even before she got in the boat, I'm sure she prayed to God. Once before a boat sank in that same place, because the waves are very bad there. There was a lady in it and she couldn't swim, and there she was with a baby in her arms, and she told me afterwards that she prayed to God, and she said: ‘Doña Natalia, look, me with my baby in my arms, and I didn't know how to swim. I didn't swim, and look, like a piece of paper, like a little feather, with my baby girl, I didn't sink.’ And two men turned the boat right side up, and they put her in it, and she says she was with her baby girl in the water for an hour and she didn't sink.”

One of the Guevara girls: “But the apostles didn't have faith. They were with Jesus there, though of course he was asleep. But they didn't get much confidence out of having Jesus with them in that boat.”

DON TOMAS: “They must have thought he was almost like any one of us. That's the way it may have been. Their lack of faith made them afraid. Then he calmed the weather and calmed the lake, to teach them that with him they shouldn't be afraid. And so we too must have faith in all of us united, because in a community there is God. And with that faith we can make it so that in the world everything will be better. Because he goes with us, like he was in that boat, even though it's like he's asleep and we don't even feel that he's with us. He looks like he's asleep but he never sleeps.”

ELVIS: “As I see it, faith is very important—the faith that we can change this world we live in. Anybody who doesn't have faith is screwed. These people don't expect anything and they don't believe in anything and with people like that you can't bring about any change.”

TOMAS: “That's the way it was with them. They were absolutely lost.”

OSCAR: “When Jesus woke up—he was asleep—and looked at the wind, he got real angry. I think he got angry because his disciples, even though he was there with them, had doubts. He got sore because they didn't have faith

in him. When danger came they went to wake him from his sleep. But what they had was fear, not faith. They wanted to see if that man could still do something to calm the wind. Then he got sore and he calmed the wind, showing them the power he had. And so that they wouldn't have doubts, whether he was asleep or awake."

BOSCO: "I think faith is what saves you. There I was in the water. I knew that the lake was deep, but I had faith in God. 'I'm not going to drown here like some stupid bastard, without making anything of my life,' was what I said to myself. And so I kept myself from sinking by my faith, and more faith, and more faith, until suddenly Euduviges' boat came by. I didn't see it coming through the big waves until it was on top of us. But I never lost my faith. I said to God that if I wasn't going to be worth a shit I didn't care if I drowned. But if I was going to be good for anything he had to save me. I said, 'Son of a bitch, God, if I'm going to be of any use to anybody, I can't drown!' And my mamma was shocked and said, 'You're swearing!'"

Bosco's mother, Doña Chalia, still very moved, didn't say anything, she just wiped away some tears.

BOSCO went on: "It's one thing to be inside the boat, and it's another very different thing to be outside the boat. Outside the boat, if you give up to despair you drown. Outside the boat, if you lose faith, you're really screwed."

Young IVAN: "Even though he wasn't around there, Jesus took care of us. Inside of us, he gave us courage, and he saved me from the waves."

OSCAR: "He was with you, just as he was in that boat with the disciples when he was asleep. It looked to the disciples as though he wasn't doing anything, but they were protected."

IVAN: "But it looks as though in this case he was sounder asleep than when he was with the disciples." [We all laughed.]

CHEPE, Ivan's brother-in-law: "I think Jesus went to sleep on the disciples to teach them how to behave when he wasn't there."

Another one added: "When he would be sleeping afterwards when he died."

ALEJANDRO: "I agree with Chepe, and this applies to us in many other things that have nothing to do with boats or waves, in other kinds of storms that we have. The lack of love in the world, that's the stormy lake. And it's not that we're not going to have our boat overturned or suffer other misfortunes. Faith is having faith in the company of Christ, who goes with

us on the stormy lake. And that's the same as saying that faith is having faith in your friend."

FELIPE, who was the one that found the overturned boat this morning: "Faith is the faith that many young people have today. It's faith in change, in the revolution. It's faith that the world can be changed by love, that evil can become good, that those angry waves can be calmed."

ALEJANDRO: "But here in Solentiname, right here and now. If some lady's child is sick with malaria, we're not going to tell her to have faith in God and the child won't die. Faith in God is also faith in people united in a community, and that faith *can* cure the child."

Alejandro's mother: "The greatest evils of humanity are due to lack of love, and God doesn't solve them personally. He does it through love among people. We used to be content with faith in a Jesus in heaven, who isn't the one who's in the storm, the one who is here with us in the person of the other, in so-and-so, in what's-her-name, the Jesus who's with the people, even though he's asleep."

> *Then Jesus said to the disciples: "Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?" They were much frightened and they said to each other: "Who is this man, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"*

TOMAS: "They still lacked faith. Seeing what he was doing, they still believed in other things. They didn't believe in him."

MARIITA: "He scolds them because they're afraid and because they don't have faith. To have faith is the same as not being afraid. It's not believing that nothing bad will happen to you."

TOMAS: "If they had had faith they would have kept their mouths shut, right? Of course, they didn't know. They didn't think he was Jesus Christ."

OSCAR: "Look here, Ernesto, it seems that the disciples were stupider than us. Because they were around him and saw him and they still had doubts. But we don't see him; we only see each other, or we see him in others. And we believe, we have the faith, we have no doubts about him. Shit! They must have been really stupid."

I said: "We also see many miracles or signs—'miracle' means 'sign'—that Jesus has performed throughout history, the transformations that his

word has brought about. And still we often doubt that the world can be transformed, that the winds and the waves of history can be calmed."

"That's right!" OSCAR exclaimed, and at the same time TOMAS said: "What we can do—right?—if we have love."

LAUREANO: "They could have done what Jesus did and that's why he scolded them. Because I think we too have the power to work miracles."

I said: "This reminds me of a phrase I heard Fidel use in Havana in his July 26th speech: 'Miracles are made by the people.' It might seem to be an atheistic phrase, but it isn't."

Others commented: "Maybe it's not necessarily that they should go and give orders to the waves and the wind. But they ought to have had more confidence in themselves because they were seasoned sailors."

"Not only confidence in themselves but above all in their mission, which Jesus had already explained to them. And since they had that mission they shouldn't have been such stupid bastards as to think that they were going to die in a stupid boat. He had said to them, 'Let's go over to the other shore.' They were going to preach the message of the kingdom on the other shore, and to be scared was a lack of faith in that kingdom."

"They weren't sure they were going around with the true man. That he was the real Messiah."

"I think faith isn't whether we know Christ or don't know him. It's that we have faith that the world can change, and that we have love, which is the same thing. It's not a matter of knowing God either, because who knows God?"

"The ones who love others, according to Saint John, know God. And maybe they don't call themselves Christians," I said.

"And the Christian who doesn't believe in change is a Christian without faith," commented someone else.

OSCAR: "Everything is in getting together. Together we can work a lot of miracles."

Another: "Many misfortunes are due to the people themselves, even shipwrecks, like the wreck of the *Maria Guadalupe* that sank because the captain had it overloaded. Not to speak of the sicknesses that can be cured and many other setbacks that we shouldn't blame on God but on people."

TOMAS: "Blame them on ourselves."

I said: "On ourselves or on others, right?"

FELIPE, Tomas's son: "On others!"

TOMAS, deliberately: “On everybody. Because the fact is that if we don't speak nobody can understand. Only when the people insist can things be understood. That's why it must be us.”

ADAN: “I think that now a lot of people don't believe anything. Maybe even most people. Even the most religious people, they don't believe either. They are absolute unbelievers, I've seen it. They say you can't make any changes here. And many talk against it. They have no faith.”

OSCAR: “This change in people is made by people themselves, like just now the miracle of their rescue in the middle of the lake. God did it with Euduviges’ boat that all of a sudden passed by.”

ELVIS: “Then we're going to have a society the way the lake got that time with Jesus. The wind calmed down and everything was absolutely quiet.”

TOMAS: “The fear ended and they felt liberated.”

At this point I made an observation I had read in a theological article. The words of Jesus after he had calmed the lake—“Why are you so afraid? How is it that you have no faith?”—are out of place, because the disciples no longer had any reason to be afraid if the storm had passed. Those words don't seem to have been said by Jesus but were said much later to other disciples, those of a Christian community, a persecuted community, who were gathered to hear the story of the Gospel and were commenting on it as we are commenting here. They applied those stories to their situation at the time and they adapted them to the new circumstances, as we do here. And sometimes the commentaries came to be part of the Gospel. In this case it was a commentator who encouraged the community not to be afraid. We can't know the details of what happened on the lake because the stories were modified by the readings of the first communities. Undoubtedly something once happened with Jesus on the lake, in a boat. There are very realistic details that were engraved on the memory of a witness: the fact that Jesus was asleep in the stern with his head on a pillow (maybe just some rope), and the fact that there were other boats crossing. There may have been a squall. He may have calmed their great fright. But this dramatic story of the storm stopped in an instant was created for a frightened little community, and the words of Jesus are meant to take away their fear. They are no less now for us, and this is what is important in this Gospel—not what happened once on a stormy lake in Galilee.

BOSCO: “We are now travelling in that boat. The oppressions, that's the overturn, right? But we've got to feel safe, because Jesus is in the boat with

us, even though he's asleep in the stern."

COSME, the boatman: "We're going through a squall of injustices. The inequalities are the waves that are rising and falling."

TOMAS: "Our boat is filling with water and we can't bale it out. But then we have to call out to Jesus, and that means getting together. If we all get together and think: 'We're going to do such and such,' we can do anything. But if I say one thing, you say another thing and somebody else says something else, then we don't get anything done. If we all agree on doing something, it'll get done quickly, no matter what it is, because he'll be right in the middle of us to make the miracle. If he wasn't in the middle of us we wouldn't be doing anything here, and none of us would be speaking, because his word is the word we speak. Lots of times we don't come here because we have to do other things or because we don't have a boat, but we always have the desire to get together. If we didn't we wouldn't have faith in Christ or any trust in him."

FELIPE: "The storm is the attacks of the enemies of this Gospel message. And we shouldn't be afraid. We must have faith, as Jesus said that time to the men who were in a boat with him."

OLIVIA: "He travels with us in the community. The boat is the community."

49.

The Possessed Man of Gadara

(Mark 5:1–20)

While we shared this commentary, the lake was very rough, as it usually is in the February winds.

We read that Jesus crossed the lake in a boat and landed on the other side in Gadara. I said that this was a city of the Decapolis, a confederacy of ten cities with a predominantly pagan population, of Greek origin, located around the lake. There a possessed man came out to them; he seemed to be a raving madman. The expression “God Most High” that he used appears in the Bible mostly on the lips of pagans.

> *This man lived among the graves and no one could keep him tied, even with chains…. He went around all the time day and night through the hills screaming and cutting himself with stones. But when he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and knelt down before him and shouted to him: “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of God Most High? I beg you for God's sake not to torment me.”*

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that the possessed man would damage a community a lot, and Jesus wants to drive the devil out of him so that he'll leave the people in peace. Then the devil would feel like a failure. He was very happy making war on society. And that's why he didn't want to be driven out.”

Another said: “A man with a devil inside him is a danger for everybody else. And he's a great problem especially for those who are closest to him, parents, wife, children.”

And another: “He was probably a fellow with problems, who probably hated other people and hated himself.”

FELIPE: “People who withdraw from a community, or make war on it, are also people who have devils inside them. And those people don't want Jesus to get involved with them. Those people don't come here and they don't want others to come.”

MANUEL: “All the ones who are against the message of Jesus, which is the message of the unity of all people, they're saying the same thing: ‘Don't come around bothering me, we're just fine here.’”

MARCELINO: “It seems that the man is not innocent, because he acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God and he doesn't want him to approach. But the one who was talking wasn't the man. He says: ‘Don't come bothering me,’ and Jesus wasn't coming to bother the man. He was coming to bother the impure spirit. It was the spirit that was talking. When the spirit left him the man was all right and he wanted to follow Jesus. The man was really a good man.”

JULIO: “Just like the worker and the *campesino* often look like they don't want to be liberated, but they're not the ones that don't want to. It's because the demon of exploitation inside them makes them talk that way or feel that way.”

FELIPE: “The demon can be the selfishness that's in the heart, and when somebody talks like that it's because of selfishness. I'm convinced that selfishness is the worst demon you can have inside you. We're not the same as our other selfish side, and Jesus comes to free us from what isn't us. He doesn't come to bother us. He comes to bother our selfishness.”

Another said: “The demon of selfishness makes us withdraw from others, like that man that wandered around deserted places.”

And another: “His madness was also to wander around the graves because death attracted him. He preferred the dead to the living, and there are people who have evil spirits that hate life and love death.”

OSCAR added: “That's right! He was a walking dead man. A man that likes to live alone out there in deserted places is dead.”

And another: “Look, Ernesto, I'm also thinking that the impure spirit can be when the man is stuffed with money. He has lots of it and he wants more. And we have to drive out that demon of selfishness that he has inside him, as Jesus Christ did. The evil spirit is exploitation. They call us communists when we talk to them about equality and brotherhood, and they don't want

us to come near them, because they don't want to be our equals. Jesus did that with the demon so we'll have courage and so we'll do the same with those who don't want the community of all people."

> *And Jesus asked him: "What is your name?" And he answered: "My name is Legion, for there are many of us."*

Several young people commented: "He means that the demon was powerful and that there were quite a few of them. There were heaps of them!"

"Maybe he wanted to tell Jesus that the ones that hated were an army. They hated others and they hated themselves."

"I think maybe it's because all evil spirits, pride, selfishness, hatred, greed, they are all a battalion."

"On the other hand, the one who came to drive them out was only one."

"He's saying that there are many of them," I said, "and also that they are *legionaries*, which is like saying 'Green Berets,' that they are made to kill."

OSCAR: "It's true that they're well disciplined and very powerful, but if we get together we are stronger than they are. Because Jesus was alone and yet all by himself he humiliated them and made them get out and flee. And if the people get together with Jesus, no matter how powerful the devils are, the people can defeat them and make them flee. They have no strength against Jesus—against the united strength of all of us, who are Jesus."

NATALIA: "But one man alone or one woman alone can't stand up to a whole battalion of devils."

We then read that the spirits asked Jesus to let them enter the pigs, and he let them:

> *There were about two thousand pigs that threw themselves over a cliff and fell into the lake, where they drowned.*

NOEL, an agronomist who is visiting us, said: "Did Jesus perhaps want the man to be free of the demons even though the pigs were lost and that farm was damaged?"

I said that we must keep in mind that Jews couldn't eat pork because the pig was considered an impure animal, and the breeding of pigs they considered to be illegal. I don't know if that applied also to those cities that were mostly pagan.

MARCELINO: “He sends the demons into the pigs to make us see that the demons are impure and they shouldn't be in people. Not even the pigs accept them, and they drown.”

Others commented: “It wasn't pigs that were important to Jesus, it was people.”

“Yes, because Jesus didn't want a reign of pigs but a reign of people. That's why he didn't care if the pigs were lost.”

“Besides, he wasn't doing any harm to the community. He was doing it good when he drove out that spirit that was damaging everybody. Notice that even the pigs went mad and threw themselves into the lake.”

OSCAR said: “Those bastards must have been capitalists. They were only interested in screwing the public with their business. It didn't matter to them that the man was cured. All that mattered was that they lost a lot of money, I think.”

NOEL, the agronomist: “That kind of thinking goes on even today. You ought to see how the capitalists take care of their pigs and their pedigreed bulls, and they couldn't care less if *campesino* kids are starving or sick or dying. And you ought to see how they're poisoning the people with their insecticides.”

An old man said: “A friend of mine was telling me that over on the other shore there were a bunch of families on some land that belonged to Somoza, and one of his men came and put a lot of cattle in the bean fields that they'd sown and he didn't care anything about those families.”

> *And people came to see what had happened. When they came to where Jesus was, they saw the man who used to have the evil spirits in his body and who now was sitting dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid.*

OLIVIA: “Instead of being glad! Because it seems to me that in a community when someone who was sick isn't sick any more that's a joy. If there is love there is joy when you see your friend well and healthy. It's logical that there should be surprise but also satisfaction. But fear…that's very peculiar. It seems to me like selfishness.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “It seems that there must have been more demons there, and that's why they were afraid and they wanted Jesus to go away.”

FELIPE, his son: “People are often afraid of the word of God because they don't know it. Among us the word of God is often feared, not through ill will but through propaganda, through what they say about ‘communism.’ The same thing could have happened to those people. Since some of them saw that others were afraid, they also were afraid. Even without having demons they were afraid because they were seeing others who did have demons and who were afraid.”

Another said: “There are many humble people among us that maybe are good, but we're scared.”

FELIPE went on: “We don't have to look very far. Here in Solentiname we have humble people who are good but they're scared of change. It's the fear of communism that the propaganda of those in power has put into them. That's why there are so few of us gathered here.”

I said: “Not only the simple people. The professionals and the intellectuals are also deceived. Every day they read the capitalist papers and they believe everything they read, without stopping to think how those news stories get written and who writes them.”

And those who had seen it told them what had happened to the man who had the evil spirits, as well as to the pigs. Then they began to beg Jesus to go away from their land.

COSMITO the boatman (with the big smile with which he always talked): “I figure how it must have been. There was a herd of pigs around there that suddenly went crazy or something and went off in a stampede and since there was a cliff they all fell in the water. Since some guy had just been cured who said he had an army of devils inside him and since there were a lot of pigs, people thought that bunch of devils had got into them. But this has helped us see that devils are pigs.”

JULIO: “And also that the healing of a man is more important than two thousand pigs.”

One of the Guevara girls: “They want Jesus to go away because they see he has great power, and they don't know if he's going to use it for good or for evil. They don't have confidence in him even though they see that he's driving the demons out of that land.”

OSCAR: “They wanted him to go away because they knew the great power there was in that man who was curing those sick people. They knew

what they were doing in their exploitation. Maybe it was even their fault that those people were sick and crazy."

Another: "But nobody was exploiting that mad man."

OSCAR: "Of course they were! It was their fault that he was that way. Look here. If some rich bastard is exploiting me all the time and taking everything I make away from me, maybe I'll go crazy."

I said that it was true, that mental illnesses almost always, in the last analysis, are due to social conflicts. If we didn't have these great social unbalances we wouldn't have unbalanced individuals either. That fear that they had, as Oscar said, was the fear that freedom inspires in many people. But the man who had been freed didn't have that fear.

When Jesus entered the boat the man who had had the evil spirits begged him to let him go with him. But Jesus would not let him. He told him: "Go home to your family and tell them all that the Lord has done to you and how he has taken pity on you."

"Surely because of that illness, that madness of his, he had left his home and had neglected the support of his family. And Jesus sends him to his family because they need him and also so that he can take them the message."

"And Jesus had to leave in the boat, but he leaves him there to persuade those people, who were very selfish. They were afraid because they were so selfish."

"He had to leave because he couldn't stay just in one place. He was interested in other places, but he left one fellow there to hand on to others what he received. Here in Solentiname also he has given something to us not only for us to have but so we will hand it on."

"But we must begin with our own homes. My wife says to me: 'What are you going to do in that stupid church?' Well, if I can't win in my own house, how am I going to win in other houses?"

The man went away and began to tell in the cities of Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all were amazed.

OLIVIA: "Jesus tells him to tell what God has done for him. He didn't tell him to talk about Jesus. But the man told what Jesus had done for him.

Perhaps because he realized that Almighty God was now a man; he was Jesus.”

ELVIS: “Jesus told him to go to his family, but he went to all the cities. Maybe because now he felt all people were his brothers.”

I said: “Perhaps Jesus didn't take that man because he was a pagan, and Jesus’ mission, during his lifetime, was confined to Israel. But that man stayed there as a sign of the transformation of that world (alienated and violent, an enemy of community, and a grave dweller) which Christ was coming to liberate from its legions of demons and also even of its Roman legions, and finally of all oppression and of all armies.”

COSME: “Christ went away in the boat, but from then on there began to be a change on that shore.”

50.

What Makes People Impure

(Matthew 15:1–20)

The Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus why his disciples ate without complying with the ceremony of washing their hands, thus breaking the traditions of their ancestors. He answered:

> *And why do you also break the commandment of God to follow your own traditions? Because God said: "Respect your father and your mother," and "He who curses his father or his mother, let him die." But you say that a man can say to his father or his mother: "I cannot help you, because all that I have I have offered to God."*

I said: "Those purifications that the Jews had were very respectable religious traditions, but we see that Jesus and his disciples pay no attention to them."

ALEJANDRO: "It's interesting to see that Jesus is against traditions. He criticizes the Pharisees because they disobey God to follow their own traditions. In our religions also there are many traditions that aren't in accord with what God wants, that is, with love. Then we must break with tradition, as Jesus did, for he wasn't at all traditional."

LAUREANO: "I think we have broken with that nonsense, because for example we attend Mass dressed in soccer clothes, dirty, not wearing elegant clothes like people wear in Managua when they go to church."

MYRIAM: "What is important, according to Jesus, is the insides of people."

LAUREANO: “Why, yes, here we can come to church dirty, but we're pretty clean inside. While the ones who come very elegant, maybe they exploit people. They're all rotten on the inside, but on the surface they're all neat and clean.”

I said that Jesus was answering them sarcastically, giving the example of a Jewish vow called the *corban*. With that vow possessions were dedicated to the temple and no profane use could then be made of them. Many times the vow was only a verbal one and the vowers continued to make use of the possessions. But the dedication could be used as an excuse for not sharing them with anyone.

MARCELINO: “And they replaced the commandment to love (even love for parents) with a religious rite. This occurs with people who content themselves with religious acts and don't concern themselves with others.”

OLIVIA: “And there's the tradition of giving capital to build imposing churches, like all the ones that the earthquake toppled in Managua. And meanwhile these people neglect all the living Christs who are starving. They don't interest them. They're interested only in filling their pockets with coins snatched from the Christs that they exploit. And what they have left over is for the church, for a baptismal font, or a shrine, things that really have no importance.” After a pause, she continued: “Their tradition is to give alms as though God were a beggar!”

DON TOMAS PEÑA: “We're the ones who are beggars.”

GLORIA: “It's also their tradition to buy statues of saints, terribly expensive statues. That's silly, stupid…”

ARMANDO, the Venezuelan: “They're religious people who don't carry out God's commandment because they're religious. And I think, too, of those bishops opposed to socialism. They don't like socialism because they have their own traditions, not because they're following God's mandate.”

So you have abandoned the mandate of God to follow your own traditions.

LAUREANO: “Jesus makes them see that God and traditions are opposed. And it's because God is a revolutionary.”

Hypocrites! The prophet Isaiah spoke well of you when he wrote: “These people honor me with their mouths, but their hearts are far

from me. It does them no good to worship me, for their teachings are only mandates of men."

I said: "The Pharisees were a kind of religious party, and they were completely religious, faithful fulfillers of all the rites and precepts of their religion. They were not intrinsically 'hypocrites' in the sense in which we understand that word, because their piety was genuine and not a mere disguise in most cases. But Jesus is always calling them hypocrites, those really religious people, because he finds that their religion, even when it's faithfully carried out, is really false, an invention of men (in the same sense that for Marx all religions are the invention of men). And he finds that their religion is also alienating. It separates them from the liberation that is the 'mandate of God' (the God that brought them out of Egypt). And it's interesting to see that here Jesus is already attacking all religious worship in general, not only the ceremony of washing hands, for he quotes that phrase of Isaiah where God says: 'It does no good for them to worship me.' The prophets had stood firm saying that God did not want worship or prayers or incense or sacrifices or fasting or chants or offerings. What he wanted was justice among people and the liberation of the oppressed. The prophets didn't call for a reform in worship or a replacement of a false worship by a true one. They wanted, instead of any worship, love among people. Jesus takes up the same message from the prophets and he repeats with Isaiah that religious worship, even though it consists of biblical prescriptions, is 'only mandates of men.'"

Then he called the people to him and he said to them: "Listen and understand: What goes into man's mouth is not what makes him impure. It is rather what comes out of man's mouth that makes him impure."

I said that in Leviticus and Deuteronomy there are long lists of all the animals, pure and impure, those that could be eaten and those that couldn't be eaten. But we see that Jesus corrects even the Bible. Precepts that appear in the Bible as if given by God are, according to Jesus, purely human precepts.

LURIO: "And we must notice that he doesn't say we have to fulfill those precepts and *also* the precept of love. He is simply against all religious

precepts (because I think that what he says about food is only an example), against all precepts which are not the precept of love."

> *Then the disciples approached Jesus and they said to him: "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard what you said?"*

MANUELITO: "They are angry because Jesus is bringing a social revolution. That talk of love was incompatible with a slave society. And they were content with religion."

> *But he answered them: "Any plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them be; for they are blind leading other blind."*

REBECA: "The blind are the ones that have no love."

FELIPE: "I believe the plants that his Father has not planted are all the religions invented by human beings, which are going to be uprooted by the revolution. The only religion that God has given us is to love others."

GLORIA: "Those blind people who are leading are, it seems to me, the bishops and priests who don't understand Christianity, and who are wrong and who make others go wrong. They misunderstood the Gospel and they've preached it badly and that's why we had a very poor understanding of the Gospel until a while ago."

We saw that later Peter asked Jesus in private to explain that parable to them (which really isn't a parable) and he said to them:

> *Don't you understand that everything that enters through the mouth goes to the stomach and then is expelled into the toilet-bowl? But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart, and this is what makes man impure. Because from the heart come evil intentions, murders, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, lies, insults.*

MARCELINO: "It's strange that they hadn't understood that. It was so simple. It wasn't any puzzle."

ARMANDO: "It was probably because it was so contrary to their mentality. They were accustomed to thinking of pure and impure as material things, while for Jesus pure and impure are just the inside of people."

MARCELINO again: “What matters is what comes out of the mouth. And that's words. If you have love in your heart, the words are good. If you don't, what come out are words of hatred, cruel words, murderous words, words of deceit and theft. What makes people impure is not to have love.”

MANUEL: “From the heart come words and from words come actions.”

ALEJANDRO: “Crime, robberies, adultery, and all injustices are committed with words, and that's why he says that impurity comes out of the mouth of man. But good words also exist, and those are the words that ought to come out of us.”

I said: “Jesus has told them crudely that no food stains people because what we eat we shit. Everything is pure in nature. And injustice is the only thing that dirties people and the universe. That's the only shit. According to Saint Matthew, Jesus gave that explanation in private to his disciples, and according to Saint Mark he gave it in ‘the house.’ It's clear that, in addition to what he preached for everyone, Jesus had some special teachings for his close friends. But we who are gathered here are also receiving now those teachings for the close friends.”

51.

The Healing of the Daughter of the Canaanite Woman

(Matthew 15:21–28)

Jesus left there and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

I said that this meant that Jesus left Israel and went abroad. The Gospel does not tell us why. We may think he was fleeing. We know that he was being persecuted. There must have been some reason why he had to leave the country. He goes to a neighboring country (as we go to Costa Rica). But earlier the Gospel had told about the death of John the Baptist and it said that when Jesus heard the news he went away in a boat, to a place apart, although many people followed him there. Now we find him among the pagans.

And a Canaanite woman who lived in that region came to Jesus crying: "Lord, Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter has an evil spirit and suffers terribly." But Jesus gave her no answer. Then his disciples begged him: "Pay heed to her, for she comes crying after us." Then Jesus said: "God has sent me only to the lost sheep of the nation of Israel." But the woman approached and knelt down before him, saying: "Lord, help me!" And Jesus said to her: "It is not right to take bread from children and give it to puppies."

JULIO: "He behaved very badly."
MANUEL: "He was too burned up."

ELVIS: “It seems to me that when the woman made that plea to Jesus, he didn't like it. He rejected it. Why? Who knows?”

LAUREANO: “She must have been a rich old woman.”

JORGE, a young Chilean who was visiting us and who had fled from his country soon after the military coup: “She must have been an oppressor. The children must have been the children of Israel, the oppressed, and she probably belonged to the oppressors, which is why he calls them dogs.”

I said that the region of Tyre and Sidon, which was also called Phoenicia, was the nation with the best developed commerce in antiquity. The Bible says that its merchants were princes. It was a very rich nation and therefore very oppressive. The Gospel doesn't say that that Phoenician woman was exactly a rich old woman, but it calls her “Canaanite,” and to Jews “Canaanite” was the same as saying “pagan,” and “pagan” was the same as saying “oppressor.” The Jews also called pagans “dogs” while the Chosen People were called “children of God.”

OSCAR: “There the woman is, humiliated, right? She's humbled. She knelt down to him besides. She might belong to a people of exploiters, but she got down on her knees begging his pardon. Because she says to him: ‘Yes, Lord.’”

JORGE, the Chilean: “I don't think the woman herself was an oppressor. She may have belonged to the nation of oppressors. But she also needed Christ, because she had a sick daughter.”

I said: “She believed in him as a Messiah, but she knows that he is the Messiah of another people, and she addresses him with the Jewish Messianic title ‘Son of David.’ He explains that he has been sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

FRANCISCO: “And the woman wasn't a lost sheep?”

CHEPE: “She wasn't from Israel.”

QUIQUE, the Puerto Rican student: “It gives the impression that Jesus’ movement was a nationalist movement. It wasn't internationalist. Only for one nation.”

Another said: “Selfish?”

I said: “I believe the lost sheep were only those of Israel, which had been chosen for freedom and had gone astray, that is, it had fallen into the injustices and oppressions of the other peoples. The Messiah had been promised to Israel, to free it so that, by means of that freedom, all the other peoples would be free. Jesus was always conscious that his personal

mission was limited only to Israel, but after the resurrection he charged the apostles to announce the Good News to all the peoples of the earth."

OSCAR: "That woman was too pushy. Their hour hadn't yet come."

Another of the boys said: "But she has a sick daughter and she can't wait."

And another: "That business about the bread is a comparison. It's the love that he's teaching here to his group. And then when she came to interrupt him so that he'd perform a miracle for other people, she was taking away what he was giving to his own people to give it to other people. And besides they had the devil there. What could you expect? The girl was sick; wasn't she possessed? Didn't she have an evil spirit? Illness was serious business!"

I said that those people possessed of the devil, or people "with an evil spirit" as this Gospel says, were usually cases of psychic illnesses, which in those times were considered to be of the devil. And maybe they are of the devil. Or, according to many modern scientists, they are produced by selfishness, which is similar.

QUIQUE: "I also think that Jesus wanted to give his disciples (and he was traveling only with them, because he was apparently in flight) an example of what would later be their work: to distribute that bread among all who had faith, without regard to their nationality. And I believe that now there are many people outside the church who don't seem to believe in God, but they're struggling to give the people justice, which is like saying God. And these are like those foreigners who supposedly couldn't have faith, because they weren't of the Chosen People, according to the laws of that time. These are the foreigners, the communists who are receiving the bread."

MANUEL: "That the others aren't receiving, the ones he was bringing it for. Because notice, Jesus was bringing his bread for his people, Israel, but he's had to flee from Israel. There they reject him. But outside his country a woman proclaims him Messiah, Son of David."

OSCAR: "It seems then as though the dogs deserved the bread more than the children, right?"

I said that Mark tells us expressly that Jesus had wanted to be incognito abroad. And I read Mark 7:24: "Jesus went from there to the region of Tyre and Sidon. He entered a house and he did not want anyone there to know him; but he could not hide. And soon the mother of a girl heard about him…" Mark had earlier said that Jesus had been getting a lot of attention

and that many people had come to see him, among them foreigners from Tyre and Sidon.

BOSCO: “It's clear he was now in flight.”

JORGE, the Chilean: “But we also see that he didn't want to do any work there. He was like in exile and he didn't want to do anything. He wasn't supposed to do anything there.”

But she said to him: “Yes, Lord, but even dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the tables of their masters.”

IVAN: “She humbled herself because she believed.”

OSCAR: “The woman humbled herself because she knew that he hadn't been sent to that nation, that is, to the dogs. But now the people of Israel scorned him. And she had to humble herself to see if she could get what they scorned.”

MANUEL: “But she accepts that they are dogs, doesn't she? Well, of course, because he had been sent to another nation, and she knew that God took them for dogs. That was her faith: that they are pagans, that the others are the children, and that Jesus is the Messiah of Israel.”

OSCAR spoke again: “The children scorn the bread. Then the woman thinks that maybe they wouldn't get just the crumbs but the whole loaf. And she was humbled because she wanted the loaf for herself.”

Then Jesus said to her: “Woman, how great is your faith! Let it be done as you wish.” And from that very moment her daughter was cured.

JULIO RAMON: “The girl stopped making trouble. The devil left her.”

OSCAR: “He said ‘how great is your faith’ because he was scolding her. He was harsh with her, then, and yet there she was, humbled. And then he accepted her into the Jewish people. He gave her the children's bread. She needed Jesus because that girl was making life impossible for them in that house.”

I said: “You have to keep in mind that Jesus didn't call the pagans ‘dogs,’ as the Jews called them, but ‘puppies,’ and that is a rather affectionate expression. He might also have said it a bit jokingly to the woman, with a smile on his lips. On another occasion, when Jesus praised the faith of a Roman centurion, in Capernaum, he said that later many foreigners would

come from the East and the West to sit down at the banquet of the kingdom of heaven. There are no longer dogs, only children; we are all brothers and sisters. And the bread of Jesus Christ is for all to share, even communists."

QUIQUE: "As I see it, there are two Jesuses here: the mortal Jesus who devoted himself only to the Jews because he was a Jew, and the resurrected Jesus, who's for everybody, who's international."

52.

The Sign of Jonah

(Matthew 16:1–4)

The Pharisees and Sadducees went to see Jesus; and to make him fall into a trap, they asked him to show some miraculous sign from heaven.

TOMAS PEÑA: “I believe there were a lot of curious people there who just wanted to see a miracle. And there were others who didn't like him, and if he made a miracle they were going to say maybe it was the devil's work. And that's why they want to trap him there. That's why they tell him: perform a miracle. But he wasn't going to perform any miracle. What he was going to do was complete, it wasn't a miracle.”

I asked TOMAS what he meant about its being complete, and he said: “Well, Jesus wasn't going to do a thing just for people to look at it, but for it to be a complete change of everything, and that's something that takes more time and more work. So it seems to me.”

And one of the young people said: “They wanted him to declare himself in public to be the Messiah, that is, Liberator, so they could set the Roman guard on him. And if he refused to do it, then he was discredited as a Messiah. That was the trap they were setting for him, it seems to me.”

But he answered them: “In the evening you say: ‘It's going to be good weather, because the sky is fiery red,’ and in the morning you say: ‘Today the weather is going to be bad because the sky is a dark red.’ Hypocrites! You can interpret the aspects of the sky but you can not interpret the signs of these times.”

Another young person: “There are many Christians who don't want to get involved in the revolution until they see in it a sign from heaven, that is, a religious sign. But they're not going to see more than what they're seeing, just as the Jews couldn't see any more than what Jesus was doing, which was freeing the oppressed and announcing the good news to the poor.”

Another added: “Since John the Baptist there was a mass movement, which they could interpret…”

TOMAS: “It seems they didn't believe in Jesus, then. They thought he was maybe a private individual, and that's why they were bothering him, asking him for a sign. But he couldn't do anything, because his hour hadn't come yet. He was just waiting.”

I said: “And Jesus is telling them that instead of the signs from heaven that they are asking for, they are seeing the signs of the times, that is, of history. And that just as they interpret the signs of the weather (which are also signs from the heavens) they should also be able to interpret the signs of the changes in history. And it seems to me that he wants to make them realize that the signs of history are also other signs from heaven.”

FELIPE: “He calls them hypocrites because they don't see what they don't want to see. And because they are religious people who are waiting for things from the heavens they don't want to see the social changes.”

JULIO: “Jesus tells them that, according to them, when the sky is one kind of red there's going to be good weather, and when it's a different red there's going to be bad weather. Old people around here say the same thing. When the sun is very red, with brilliant cloud banks, they say there was a fine sun and there'll be good weather; and when it's a sad yellowy red, kind of worn out, there'll be bad weather. Isn't that so, Don Sostenes? But it seems to me that Jesus is also telling them that because the red is blood, and it's also the revolution. Depending on what kind of red it is, we can know if it's oppression or liberation.”

MANUEL: “Maybe some of them wanted to believe in him and they were asking him for a religious sign, or rather a magic marvel. And if he'd given them that sign maybe they'd have believed in him. But Jesus was getting nowhere with that kind of faith. No social change was going to take place by getting them to believe in him that way.”

TOMAS: For sure they were expecting some powerful man to come down, a very rich man, or maybe a dictator, and that he was going to boss the

people. But then they saw him…A poor man!…And then they didn't believe in him."

ELVIS: "The fact that he was poor and was surrounded by poor people, for them that was no sign, right?"

GOYO: "Because they were self-satisfied. But for the humble and the people thirsty for justice, that *was* a sign and that's why they followed him and clung to him."

> *These evil, faithless people want a sign, but they will get no more sign than the sign of Jonah*.

I said that in two other passages from the Gospel there is a mention of the sign that Jesus will give as "the sign of Jonah," and two different explanations are given. According to Matthew, it's because Jonah was three days inside the fish, and in the same way Jesus was going to be inside the earth and afterwards was going to be resurrected. According to Luke, it was because Jonah went to preach in the city of Nineveh, which was filled with injustices, and he converted the whole population, from the king on down, making them all change their attitudes. I asked if there wasn't a contradiction between the two evangelists.

GOYO: "It's just one sign, and we are seeing it: Jesus has risen from the grave and he is here among us, and he is making us change our attitudes."

FELIPE: "Or he's going to make us change our attitudes. Because the real change of attitude is to change the social system."

And I said it was very encouraging for us, that sign of Jonah that Jesus announced. That conversion of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, a city so large that, according to the Bible, it took three days to cross it, was not a historic fact but a literary fiction. It is now known that the book of Jonah is a novel, and that Jonah was never in Nineveh, which had been destroyed long before. But Nineveh has gone on existing since, in every oppressive empire, and it still exists. And Jesus announces that he is really going to achieve the conversion of Nineveh, no longer in a literary fiction but in history.

RAUL VARGAS, a young poet from Managua: "That sign of the times of which he speaks, it seems to me, refers to the fact that Roman imperialism and slave society were coming to an end. He tells them that they must know

how to interpret history, right? One of the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire was Christianity."

ALEJANDRO: "And we too must know how to interpret the history that we are living. The signs of the times are the liberation movements in Latin America and in many other parts of the world, the social changes that are going on and the ones that have gone on in Cuba, and the fact that the poor everywhere are receiving the good news. All this is what Jesus calls the sign of Jonah."

MILAGROS, Natalia's daughter: "That sign is very clear."

53.

Peter Declares That Jesus Is the Christ

(Matthew 16:13–20)

Jesus asked his disciples who people were saying that he was, and they said:

> *Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or some other prophet.*

TERE: “He saw that the people were following him, and it seems that he wants to know why.”

WILLIAM: “He's interested in knowing what the people were thinking. And the people are never wrong. John the Baptist and all the prophets had denounced evil governments, right? And that's the reason the people said that Jesus was a new John or a new prophet. And the people weren't misled when they saw him as an accuser. But there was something the people couldn't yet know.”

> *Then he said to them: “And you, who do you say that I am?”*

WILLIAM: “And he wants to see if the ones who have been closest, the ones who know him most intimately, have now realized…”

OSCAR: “I feel that he's now asking us the same question, in this community: Who am I in your eyes? I'm going to answer for myself, as Peter answered for himself. For me, he is one who is making me change, since I came to know him (not long ago). I was a real selfish bastard, and now, it seems to me, I'm getting to be less of a one. And he has united me

with others. And he's the one that keeps us united in this community. He has brought us together. What for? To unite, with groups like this, the whole world, and to change the world."

Simon Peter then said to him: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

I said that "Christ" is the Greek word *christos*, which means "anointed" and is a translation of the Hebrew word *Mashiah* (Messiah), which also means "anointed." This is the first time in the Gospels that Jesus is proclaimed the Messiah. Peter is saying here that Jesus has been anointed king, and that he comes to free the people and to establish the kingdom of God.

OLIVIA: "That's very different from what the rest of the people were saying, that he was a new prophet. Because prophets used to announce the kingdom, while with Jesus the kingdom came."

ELVIS: "The kingdom began. But it's still a long way from being established throughout the earth."

OSCAR: "But that day is closer and closer, I say."

Jesus answered him: "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because no man has shown you this, but my Father who is in heaven."

TOMAS: "Because there are things that are learned through people. For example, one person can teach another person to read. But the wisdom of God only God teaches."

REBECA: "The truth is that the people couldn't know that he was the Messiah if they still weren't seeing any change. They had to think that he was just a prophet, an accuser, like there had been before. And they couldn't know either that he was the Son of God, because in the people's eyes he was just the son of Saint Joseph."

One of the Guevara girls: "It seems to me that the true wisdom is that of love, and that's why it says that that wisdom is not transmitted by men but comes from God, because God is love."

WILLIAM: "What they were seeing was that Jesus was a man poorly dressed, humble, a proletarian, and in his presence they didn't see anything that seemed to be a kingdom. But Peter understood in a mysterious way that this man was no longer a prophet but the one who was coming to fulfill the

prophecies of the prophets. And Peter believed in the changing of the world. That's why Jesus calls him blessed. And we too must feel ourselves blessed, this little group here, because we too believe in the changing of the world."

"But there are many Christians," I said, "who still believe that Jesus is nothing more than a prophet, that he has come to announce a future salvation but not to bring about any revolution in the present. They believe in Jesus in many ways but they don't believe in him as the Messiah. These people, the ones who don't believe in the changing of the world, Saint John calls them the Anti-Christs, the Anti-Messiahs."

> *And I say to you that you are a rock, Peter, and on this rock I am going to build my church, and not even the power of death will be able to conquer it.*

I said that *Petros* in Greek is "rock," and this is a nickname that Jesus is giving to Simon when he announces that upon him he will build his church. I said also that the Spanish word *iglesia* [church] comes from a Greek word, *ekklesia*, which didn't mean at that time a religious institution but simply a gathering, or even better, what we call today a community. I also said that we were used to the translation: "The gates of hell will not prevail against it," but that "the power of death" is more exact because Jesus was not talking about hell as we understand it now, but about the *sheol* of the Jews or the *hades* of the Greeks (the region of the dead). Jesus refers to death as a kingdom or an enemy community. Among the Jews, who put walls around their cities, the word "gates" meant military power.

MARCELINO: "He gives Simon the nickname 'Rock' because he's going to build something new. It has to be on firm rock. The firm rock, it seems to me, is the faith that he is the Messiah, the Liberator, the one who's going to change the world. Our community of Solentiname must also be based on that faith. If it isn't, the same thing will happen to us that happens to religion in many parts of the country. It's like an old house that's falling down, all shattered by the earthquake."

His wife, REBECA: "A church without faith can't be a church. It's not a community. And without that faith, we really live without life; we live without any hope."

MANUEL: “He called Peter the leader, perhaps because he was the most vigorous. He wasn't a drivelling idiot. He was the toughest. Peter was tough. Remember when he tore the guard's ear off. Christ must have said: ‘This is no ordinary son-of-a-bitch. I want him to be the head of my community.’”

I said: “We have read that Jesus called Simon ‘Son of Jonah’ (which in Hebrew is *Barjona*), but some people now think that this could have been an error in translation, because that word also means ‘terrorist.’ They think that that was another nickname that he used to have—Simon the Terrorist—and that probably meant that Simon belonged to the national liberation movement of the zealots, supporters of armed struggle. That explains why, when Jesus announced his death, he was violently opposed to the idea of Jesus allowing himself to be killed. And when they came to arrest Jesus, why he would have drawn his sword.”

Another of the Guevara girls: “That also explains why he had more faith in the Messiah, in the Liberator, because he was in the guerrilla movement.”

OSCAR: “Standing face-to-face with this other man, he didn't hesitate to tell him that he was a Son of God, right? And Jesus noticed that nobody else dared to talk with the firmness Peter talked with. Then Jesus told him he was a rock, and that he could form a community. And it's this community of ours that must also be hard as a rock because it has many enemies.”

OLIVIA, who had just lost her daughter Olguita: “And the greatest enemy is death, but Jesus says that not even death is going to prevail. It's not that none of us is going to die. Everybody dies, individually, physical death. But in community we don't die because we are in community with him, and he has conquered death. He has risen from the dead. That's why not even death can do anything against this community.”

WILLIAM: “And if death can't do anything, the other enemies can do even less. They're the allies of death.”

> *I shall give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind here in this world will be bound also in heaven, and whatever you loosen in this world will be loosened in heaven*.

I said that just as Jesus had spoken earlier of the “gates” of death, he also speaks of the kingdom of God as a walled city, and he gives Peter the keys

to those doors. The kingdom of God is different from the church or community that he had spoken about before. The community is to prepare for that kingdom. Whatever he does or undoes among people will be corroborated “in heaven,” that is, before God. We know that Matthew often, in order not to mention the name of God, uses the word “heaven.”

MANUEL: “It means that Saint Peter doesn't have the keys to the entrance to heaven. The keys of the future society of people, those are the keys of heaven.”

REBECA: “The keys are love. Because the one who loves enters and the one who doesn't love doesn't enter. They aren't keys so that he can let you enter or not let you, as he chooses.”

OLIVIA: “It seems that he's saying that he's giving him the keys because he's giving him a very big responsibility, a pledge to the people.”

FELIPE: “He goes away, he departs, leaving the kingdom as a responsibility of people.”

MANUEL: “He's giving Peter authority. And the same way he's giving that authority to the bishops and to the priests and to all the leaders of the church. With that authority in many parts of the world they are condemning the rule of the capitalists, since many people are dying because of those same capitalists. They are defending the exploited people. And so we must support that authority, we all must, when they are in favor of the people and attack the governments, because they are speaking in the name of God.”

Another young man: “And when the leaders of the revolution here in Nicaragua speak, we must support them, too, because the leaders are also speaking the truth. They also are speaking in the name of God.”

MANUEL: “Well, it used to be that the bishops and the priests weren't on the side of the people. It's been almost five years, or maybe ten (I'm not sure it's that long) that they've spoken up for the people. And if they were with the oppression they weren't with the community of Christ, their church. But every leader of social change, of the coming of the kingdom of God, is also a representative of the community of Christ.”

I said that the church that Christ founded upon the rock of Peter (maybe because Peter, a militant in a national liberation movement, had a firm messianic faith) was intended to create the kingdom, but the kingdom would not be the church. It would overflow it and it would cover the whole earth. And Saint Paul said that in the end Christ will deliver this kingdom to the Father after destroying all “dominion” and all “authority” (when people

are entirely free), and that the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. For that reason, as Christ says, the gates of death will not prevail.

Then Jesus ordered his disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.

OSCAR: “Maybe because he didn't want everybody following him like sheep. He wanted them to believe with a firm faith like Peter and not because they were dragged along by somebody else.”

JULIO GUEVARA: “Or maybe he didn't want a lot of publicity.”

REBECA: “He wanted them to know him as Peter knew him, because God enlightened them, and not because other people said to them ‘That one is the Christ,’ ‘That one is the Christ.’”

FELIPE: “And if he had declared himself the liberator of the poor from the beginning, they would have screwed him right then and there.”

I said that to be declared Messiah or “the Anointed One” (King of Israel) was doubly dangerous. First, with the people because it lent itself to false interpretations, since in those times the Jewish nationalists were waiting for the Messiah only as a king that would free them from Roman rule. And the kingdom of Jesus was for the whole earth and its freedom would be from all authority and rule and even from death. That's why he always shied away when they tried to proclaim him king. And second, with the authorities because it led to his death. In fact that's why they condemned him to death, and Pilate ordered them to write the crime (a political crime) on the cross: that he had declared himself king.

Someone said: “There are still many places today where it's dangerous to say this.”

54.

Jesus Announces His Death

(Matthew 16:21–23)

Last Sunday we saw that Peter had declared that Jesus was the Messiah, and now we see what Matthew said next:

> *From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he would have to go to Jerusalem and that the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law would make him suffer a great deal. He told them that they were going to kill him but that on the third day he would be raised from the dead.*

I said: “He announces that he will be condemned by all the official leaders of the Jewish people: the elders who made up the Sanhedrin or supreme court, the high priests, and the scribes.”

WILLIAM: “That always happens. Anyone who fights for the people knows that sooner or later they'll run that risk. It's always been that way, from Jesus right up to now, and even before Jesus the same thing happened to the prophets. And the convictions have always come as much from religious authorities as from political authorities. Because the religious authorities have always been allied with the politicians, though they claim to be nonpolitical.”

I said this was the first time that Jesus announced his death. He had spoken before of gathering the sheep of Israel. In biblical language to be a “pastor” means to be a leader. He was planning to begin with Israel the kingdom of justice for all. Later, when he was weeping over Jerusalem, he would complain that they wouldn't let themselves be united. It seemed that

now he had realized that his message could not be accepted either by the Sadducees, the priestly party of the high, monied class, or by the Pharisees, the traditionalist religious party of the urban middle class. Both groups felt a deep scorn, and even hatred, for the urban and rural proletariat and therefore for the cause of Jesus. And he had seen that he had no alternative but to die. He would unite humankind, but only after his death, and in fact by means of his death. And he spoke of an immediate resurrection. In biblical language "on the third day" does not mean literally three days later, but very soon afterwards, right away.

WILLIAM: "And that business of going to Jerusalem means that he is looking for a confrontation with the authorities. He's analyzed the situation and he knows perfectly well what the result will be. He's going into enemy territory. That's where the Jewish religious power and the power of Rome were. In other parts of the Gospel we see that the disciples were afraid to go to Jerusalem."

A young man: "It was almost like suicide. That's why he later said they weren't taking away his life because he chose to give it."

OLIVIA: "The disciples are now sure that he is the Messiah, for after Peter spoke he told them to keep the secret. But since there was hope that the Messiah would have a political victory, he begins now to explain to them that it's not going to be like that, that his victory will be to die."

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying: "God forbid, Lord! This must never happen to you!"

ELVIS: "I think Peter was talking there not only for himself but for everybody, and it was natural that he should think like that. They thought Jesus was interested only in ruling. And they didn't know yet that the kingdom was not to rule but to liberate."

REBECA: "They weren't thinking about others. They were thinking with selfish minds. They didn't care that others might be saved."

OLIVIA, who shocked many people by not wanting to dress in mourning when her daughter died: "They didn't care about resurrection and they pay no heed to it. Jesus says he's going to die and be resurrected on the third day, and all they think about is the death and they ignore the resurrection. They really didn't believe in it. When they think about death, they think only about death, and not death and resurrection as two things together."

REBECA: “Those who love, when they die they get resurrected like Christ right away.”

JULIO: “It seems Peter was the natural leader of the group, and maybe also that's why Jesus had confirmed him as responsible for the community. He had a lot of pull, and he even went so far as to scold Jesus. He started an argument. He told him he ought to fight and conquer, not let himself be beaten. He told him that he shouldn't let them screw him like that.”

GLORIA: “And that he shouldn't go.”

I: “In Galilee there had always been uprisings and guerrilla fighting. Armed resistance was possible. Galilee was not controlled by the Romans. But to go to Jerusalem was to put yourself defenseless into the hands of the enemy.”

> *But Jesus turned around and said to Peter: “Get away from me, Satan! For you are an obstacle to me. You do not think like God but like men.”*

OLIVIA: “He calls him Satan because Satan is selfish. Or else: selfishness —that's Satan. To think of sacrificing yourself for others is to think like God. He tells him, too, that he's thinking like men and not like God: He means that men think like Satan because they're selfish. That's the way the world thinks. And that's the way people think in Nicaragua. They think about ruling, not about sharing or giving anything to anybody. The government we have has that mentality, Satan's mentality.”

One of the young people: “You have to say to that mentality what Christ said: ‘Get away from me!’”

And another: “Peter tells Jesus that can't happen to him, because he couldn't suffer, only triumph. Peter didn't know the Messiah was a liberator. That's why Peter was an obstacle to Jesus, and to us. Otherwise we wouldn't have been liberated, not even Jesus himself would have been liberated.”

Another: “Selfishness is always an obstacle.”

TERE: “When Peter declared he was the Messiah, Jesus told him he knew this through God and not through men. But when he believes the Messiah mustn't suffer, there he isn't thinking like God but like men.”

FELIPE: “I believe people who think like humans are people who just think of themselves, and those people are mainly the exploiters, the ones who've ruled human society up to now. People who think like God are

people who think of others, people who sacrifice themselves, people who fight for liberation. And I believe that's the way people are divided: people who think like men and people who think like God."

WILLIAM: "It's very human to think like Peter, that Jesus shouldn't let himself get screwed. But that's not thinking like God, who in the Bible always appears as love, the force of life that drives people on. To think like God is to think revolutionarily. Peter, I bet, was afraid too. But fear comes from thinking about yourself. Love takes away fear. Anyone who loves isn't afraid of death."

CESAR, the teacher: "It's a temptation that Peter presents to Jesus, and we all have that temptation. On one side is the ruling and on the other side is the sacrificing. Peter and the other disciples who also sought power, and above all Judas, present that temptation to him. Jesus rejects it and chooses sacrifice. He is clear about what he has to do."

I said that what Cesar said was very sound and I added an observation of the Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuria that I had recently read: The words of Jesus to Peter are the same as those he said in the desert when the devil tempted him with a false messiahship of ruling: "Get away from me, Satan!" It's clear, then, that here Jesus was having the same temptation. And to judge by the violence of the rejection it must have been for Jesus a very strong temptation. At the end of the episode in the desert Luke says that the devil went away "for some time." We know that the power of darkness returned again on the Mount of Olives, where the agony made him sweat blood. And it is curious that it was then that he said to Peter, whom he found sleeping, that he ought to keep watch and pray "so that they would not fall into temptation." This was the great temptation of Jesus, his messianic temptation: seizing political power, as the armed struggle of the zealots understood it. This is the temptation that Peter, and perhaps not only in his own name but in the name of the other disciples, is presenting to him. We have already seen that Peter's nickname was "the terrorist." There was another disciple who was called Simon the zealot. And the family name of Judas, Iscariot, may have come from the word *Sicarii*, which was another name given to the zealots. The fact that Jesus had rejected this temptation—a real temptation for him—is no grounds for condemning, in the name of the Gospels, armed struggles for freedom. Jesus never condemned the zealots, only the supporters of the status quo: the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And he did not condemn them in spite of the risk that he might

be confused with the zealots, which in fact happened, and he was condemned as a zealot. The only thing we can say is that Jesus saw that his mission as the Messiah was different. We must keep in mind also that the zealots hoped only for freedom from the Roman Empire and for the restoration of the past grandeur of Israel, with a nationalism that in today's language we would not call revolutionary but rather reactionary, maybe even fascist.

CESAR: “Peter has not understood the mission of Jesus and he is denying it, with a denial like the one he later made during the Passion. He didn't want to die for that cause, the cause of freedom, which was going to be the glory of Jesus and of them all. Because he didn't understand that cause, he later tried to separate himself from it. We too often refuse to sacrifice because, like Peter, we don't understand our cause clearly, and the Satan Jesus speaks about is also in us. Maybe later we'll understand that that was the road we had to follow. Just as Peter later understood that the other liberation was not the true liberation of the people or of all humanity, that the road of Jesus was the more revolutionary one.”

I said that several times Jesus insisted in the Gospel that he had to die. We could ask ourselves why he had to die. To say it was to save us doesn't shed much light, because we can still ask why he had to die (and not triumph) to save us. It seems to me that Paul is very enlightening in the Epistle to the Romans when he says that the Jews’ rejection of Jesus was a secret plan (*mysterium*) of God, for it was the way other peoples have achieved salvation. The crime of the Jews, he says, turned out to be for the benefit of the world. The Jews hardened their hearts only in part, so that the other peoples could enter. Later all Israel will enter, and a consequence of this, according to Paul, will be the resurrection: “If his rejection was the reconciliation of the world, what will his acceptance not be? Nothing less than life for those who were dead.” He means that the kingdom of the Messiah became universal because it failed among the Jews. If it had triumphed, given the historical and political context of that time, it would have been purely a Jewish kingdom, along the lines of the nationalist movement of the zealots. So Jesus could not triumph in Jerusalem. He had to die in Jerusalem.

OLIVIA: “To die and rise again.”

55.

Taking up the Cross

(Luke 9:23–27)

And he said to them all: "If any one of you wants to come after me, forget yourself, take up your Cross each day, and follow me."

WILLIAM said: "It's an invitation to go with him to Jerusalem."

OLIVIA: "To forget yourself is to think of others. Just as to think about yourself is to forget others. Let's stop being selfish, that's what it means to forget yourself. Jesus wants us to forget selfishness. Not just the rich. We have to forget our selfishness and change our attitudes too, because we poor people can also be selfish and think only about ourselves and not about the community."

Another lady: "To follow Jesus means not to think about yourself, the way Jesus does, to have the same mentality as Jesus. It also means to suffer for others and that is to take up the cross each day. Because to forget yourself means to sacrifice yourself, and that is to suffer. To suffer for others, of course, not to suffer for yourself. Because the rich also suffer and sacrifice themselves, but not for others, for themselves, to heap up more treasure for themselves alone or for their families, who are themselves. And when the rich die they want their capital to stay right in their families. Even when they die they don't let go of themselves, and they go on being selfish beyond the grave."

One of the boys: "To get rid of selfishness, we have to practice that, we who follow him, right here in Solentiname, even though we're not rich. Because if we don't get rid of that old mentality we're not his followers and we're not revolutionaries."

I said: “The cross was a torture of the Roman state, not of the Jews, and it was a punishment for political crimes. It was the torture intended for subversives, who in those times as today were considered wrongdoers. Jesus is saying that his followers have to be subversives. Jesus is going to Jerusalem, which is occupied by the Romans (Galilee wasn't occupied). He knows what is waiting for him there as a revolutionary and he anticipates that the Roman state will condemn him for political crimes. He sees that that will also be the fate of his followers, those who want to go after him to a Jerusalem occupied by the Empire.”

Because he who wants to save his life will lose it, but he who loses his life for my sake, he will save it.

A young man said: “Anyone who clings to his life is screwed.”

LAUREANO: “People don't want to get involved in anything so that they won't get screwed, jailed, killed. But the one who fights evil, he runs the risk of getting screwed and the one who is fighting is fighting for his comrades, for his brothers, and so he is being saved because of them.”

FELIPE: “There are some people who fight to defend injustice and they are killed for defending it. And other people fight so there won't be any injustice. And the ones who die fighting against injustice, God will surely save. And the ones who die to defend injustice, they must have been already dead. That's the way I see it.”

Another: “I see it this way: People who defend this system to defend their security or their money, when the revolution comes, they're going to lose everything, maybe even their lives.”

I: “And they have really lost their lives already, even without anybody having had to take them away from them, because the life they lead isn't really a life. And this applies to all the selfish ones, because the life of the selfish isn't really life. They are living dead.”

WILLIAM: “And this applies especially to the rich, the ones whose lives are spent just making money to enjoy life. And what they have isn't life and they don't enjoy anything. But those who give their lives, that is, those who live for others, they are the ones who really keep their lives and enjoy them and are happy, because the only happiness is love. And that life is never lost; it's an eternal life.”

MANUEL: “Let's not talk just about the rich. Also in Solentiname, through selfishness or cowardice people don't struggle for the cause of freedom. And those people also by saving their lives lose them. Because there have been many centuries of exploitation, right? If we weren't cowardly and selfish, everybody would have been freed centuries ago.”

Another: “Take the construction workers in Managua, who've gone on a protest strike because of the sixty-hour work week that Somoza imposed on them. They're risking their security, running the danger of being jailed. But that's the way to change their conditions, and even the conditions of all the exploited, if the strike spreads to all the workers in the country.”

OSCAR: “I don't know…I'm very ignorant, but it seems to me that life and love are two things that are alike or maybe the same thing, I don't know, and so to live is to give your life for others, while to try to save your life selfishly for yourself is not to live, if you understand what I mean.”

I said: “Oscar is quite right. Life is love. And we can see that all the life in the universe is created by love: the life of people, and of animals, and of plants.”

WILLIAM: “Life and love are the same thing and the person who embraces love is the person who really lives. And the life of the selfish person isn't life. And therefore to save your life selfishly is to be in death and not in life.”

LAUREANO: “I remember Che, who is very much alive because he gave his life for others. If he had just wanted to enjoy life, he wouldn't be alive as he is, even though he'd still be living; or better, he wouldn't be alive as he is now everywhere like someone risen from the dead.”

ALEJANDRO: “Jesus says, ‘he who loses his life for my sake,’ and that means for the sake of the oppressed, the sake of the people.”

WILLIAM: “And this business of giving your life for his sake doesn't have only the sense of physical death but also of living for others. That's also a way of giving your life. Your life already belongs to others, so the life you give gets lost. It's not your life any more.”

FELIPE: “This is very interesting to me because the common people who won't fight for their freedom so they won't lose their lives, they are in fact losing their lives. Even though they're not being shot with rifles, they're being killed, because the life of the oppressed is no life.”

ARMANDO: “You can lose your life for love fighting in the street, or in jail being tortured, or in the woods, and maybe that's the way we lose it. But

there are other ways of losing your life for love, maybe even costlier ways. That's why Jesus says you have to take up the cross ‘each day.’”

“Which is like saying you have to be subversive each day,” I said.

Another: “Life is lost not only through arms. Some are not called upon to die through arms. But anyone who loves has to suffer some death, has to know some kind of death, because of his love. That's why the Gospel says that Jesus said this ‘to everyone.’”

ARMANDO: “But there's something else. Even those who die in an armed struggle have already before known an earlier death, the death of their selfishness. I'm thinking now about Che, when he said in a letter to his parents: ‘I have polished my willpower like an artist’ (I have made my heart revolutionary). And that is to become more and more generous, more and more open, more and more humble, more and more devoted to others, and that is a death. Maybe harder than the death he met at the hands of the Bolivian army.”

Another of the boys: “The ones who ‘save’ their lives are the ones who avoid sacrifice. But they lose their lives. Their lives are worthless.”

And another: “But to give your life is really to save it and not to want to give it is to lose it.”

For what good is it for a man to win the whole world if he loses himself or destroys himself?

A lady: “When you're dead, your wealth is no good to you, no matter how wealthy you used to be. And also if you're selfish your riches are no good to you, you can't enjoy them, because you can enjoy them only through the love of others. And the selfish are dead even though they win the whole world.”

And a boy: “Just by winning the whole world you destroy yourself because you become an oppressor, a selfish person. Also the rich, just by being rich, have already destroyed themselves, because to be rich is to refuse to share with others. You can't be rich without being selfish. And so it does nobody any good to possess riches because they become dead.”

And another: “According to what Jesus tells us, I see that there are two kinds of owning: owning things and owning yourself. If you win things you become rich but you lose yourself and you've won nothing.”

I said that I like this translation that we have read (“what good is it for a man to win the whole world if he loses himself or destroys himself”) better than the one we have traditionally had (“…if he loses his soul”) because the Jews didn't have a word “soul” (as distinct from the body) and for “soul” they used the word “life” (the vital principle that animates the body). That's why the Greek translation of the Gospel uses the word *psyche*, which means “life” rather than “soul.” Because we translated into our language as “save his soul” what in the language of Jesus was “save his life,” this phrase has traditionally been badly interpreted, being understood in the sense of a purely individual and other-worldly salvation. But the interpretations given here seemed to me to be very much in accord with what Jesus meant by speaking of gaining the world and losing your life (or your person).

Another said: “But if we don't destroy ourselves but possess ourselves, if we love, and if we live united with others forming all together a single person, then we *can* possess all things and conquer the whole world and all the riches of the earth. Because then we won't want all the things just to enjoy them ourselves but so everybody will enjoy everything equally, each one equal to all the others.”

WILLIAM: “What good does it do you to win the whole world if you lose your life because you don't give it up, you don't give it to others, and you want to keep it selfishly for yourself?”

> *For if someone is ashamed of me and of my message; the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when he comes as king, with the glory of his Father and of the holy angels*.

I said that “glory” is something that in the Old Testament is applied only to God. Jesus here says that the Son of Man (who is also, so to speak, Man) will come with the glory of God. And in the Old Testament God appears always surrounded by angels. Jesus says that he also will come with angels, that is, sharing in the divinity.

MARIITA: “Jesus was poor and his message was for the poor. The rich and the proud may be ashamed of him and of his message, and in fact they *are* ashamed of him.”

FELIPE: “People who are ashamed of humble clothes, of the *campesino*'s coarse cotton shirt, they're ashamed of Jesus and his message. And people

who are proud of their fine cars, their elegant clothes, their luxurious houses, they're ashamed of Jesus too."

ARMANDO: "And he says that he will be ashamed of them, because false Christians are really a shame to him. He, who was a revolutionary, has disciples who are rich. He, who struggled so hard against the religious practices of the Pharisees, has seen his doctrine now converted into a purely religious rite, and his liberation into an opiate of the people. This must be a great shame for him."

> *I tell you truly that there are some of those here present who will not die without having first seen the kingdom of God*.

I said: "This is a very mysterious verse and I have never understood it clearly. A teacher of ours at the seminary who was a great biblical scholar couldn't give us a good explanation. But maybe you *campesinos* can discover the true interpretation."

MARIITA: "The kingdom of God isn't heaven, because he says some of them won't die without seeing it."

REBECA: "The kingdom of God is love, and people who love are beginning to see it."

OLIVIA: "But he says that *some* of those present there. He doesn't say 'all,' not even 'many.' Because most of them weren't going to believe in him and therefore weren't going to see that kingdom, which would be the kingdom of only a little group, the group of his followers united in love and having all things in common. The same thing can be said here in Solentiname. Many people don't come to these meetings and don't share in the kingdom of God which has already begun to exist in a little group. They haven't yet seen this kingdom and they don't know that it exists. That's the same thing that happened with the people who were listening to Jesus. Most of them didn't understand the kingdom of God even though it was right here in the middle of them."

FELIPE: "In this meeting we are having an experience of the kingdom."

ALEJANDRO: "Together with many in other little groups in Nicaragua and in many other parts of the world."

I said: "You have made me understand this verse quite clearly."

56.

The Transfiguration

(Luke 9:28–36)

And while Jesus was praying, his face changed in appearance, and his clothes became white and shining.

OLIVIA: “That change happened to him so the disciples would see he was going to rise from the grave, and so we can see we're going to be transformed like him. If we change our attitude we're going to have the same change his face and his clothes had. That light they saw in him will be in us too.”

MARIA: “This happened when he was praying. And I think that for us too it's important to pray. He was praying to prepare himself for what he was going to suffer.”

There appeared two men conversing with him, who were Moses and Elijah, surrounded by a glorious splendor, and they were talking of the death that Jesus was going to suffer in Jerusalem.

TOMAS: “And those two dead men that appear beside him and that are very happy, it's to make us see they hadn't died, and they were not only alive, they had a better life.”

FELIPE, Tomas's son: “That was also to give them courage, because Jesus was going to be like the two of them, but only after suffering the same death that they did. And that's why they're talking about his death.”

They asked me why Moses and Elijah appeared, and I said that Moses was the great liberator of the people, that he brought them out of Egyptian

slavery, and Elijah was a great prophet, a defender of the poor and the oppressed, when Israel again fell into slavery, with social classes. Both of them were closely identified with the Messiah, for it had been said that the Messiah would be a second Moses and that Elijah would come back to earth to denounce injustices as a precursor of the Messiah (and Jesus said that Elijah had already arrived in the person of John the Baptist).

WILLIAM: “They're talking about his death, and they're in glory too, sharing that glory of his. It seems to me it's because all people who share the sufferings of Christ and struggle for his cause (for freedom) will share in that same glory of his, like those two prophets. And I believe that when they were talking about his death they weren't talking just about him but also about all people who together with him were going to enjoy that same happy ending.”

OLIVIA: “As I see it, the resurrection is something you can already begin to have in this life. Christ was still made of mortal flesh, and they already see him with that brightness, that light so beautiful, the way he'd be after his death, resurrected. The others hadn't seen this, only these disciples had this vision. They've seen Jesus this way, already transfigured in life because of the death he was going to have. And what they saw there you can apply to the people, the people still suffering. They're transfigured like Christ even though we can't see it, because the people are Christ himself.”

ELVIS: “There's two kinds of death: the death of somebody who isn't united to the people that's Christ, and that's a real death; and then there's the death of somebody who *is* united, and that's a death with resurrection.”

WILLIAM: “It seems to me the victory over death is when somebody, because of the good he's done for others, becomes part of future humanity, which will be resurrected. Even though your death is obscure and nobody remembers it, you stay alive in the consciousness of humanity. And what the disciples saw in that little moment is the glory of that future humanity.”

I: “The translation that we have read says they were talking about ‘his death,’ but Saint Luke is really saying that they were talking about ‘his departure,’ and this is interesting because in Greek ‘departure’ is called Exodus, and this is the word that he uses. And by this he's saying too that with his death Jesus was going to head a new Exodus, a new departure of the people toward freedom. We can read the text as if it literally said, ‘They were talking of the departure of Jesus.’”

FELIPE: “The Exodus is the revolution.”

I: “In the Bible, God appears fundamentally like the God of Exodus, which is like saying the God of freedom. The prophet Amos says that the Exodus of Israel was not the only one and that Yahweh had brought other peoples out of other slaveries. Which is like saying that Yahweh is the God of every revolution.”

REBECA: “That Jesus, he's here now in this community freeing us from all slavery. We can see him shining in the unity of the community, with the light they saw in him, which is the light of love.”

OSCAR: “If we don't sleep through it.”

Although Peter and his companions were very sleepy they stayed awake and they saw the glory of Jesus and the two men who were with him.

OLIVIA: “The Passion was near, and maybe those two were there to give him courage and strengthen him in his decision to die for the freedom of humankind.”

WILLIAM, smiling: “They must have talked and talked there that night, because the apostles were so sleepy.”

When those men were going away from Jesus, Peter said to him: “Master, what a good thing we're here! Let's build three huts: one for you, another for Moses, and another for Elijah.” But he didn't know what he was saying.

LAUREANO: “He was confused.”

OSCAR: “He has a vision of heaven and he wanted to stay there, without having to suffer. He wanted heaven but without suffering, he wanted it free for nothing, without stewing, and that's what's wrong with me too.”

OLIVIA: “A little while before that, Peter had told Jesus they shouldn't go to Jerusalem on any account, and now we see that he's very pleased there enjoying the joy of the resurrection without suffering. He thought that was all they had to do, just be there sitting pretty, without having to struggle. He didn't know what he was saying, because he thought they could stay like that, without suffering. He didn't know it was a vision and that they had to come back to reality. That glory was real, but it was in the future and it would be the result of suffering.”

MARIITA: “That vision was to struggle.”

And while they were talking, a cloud came and covered them, and they were afraid when they saw themselves inside the cloud. Then inside the cloud a voice was heard saying: "This is my beloved Son; listen to him."

FELIPE: "They weren't very socially conscious and that's why they were scared."

I: "In the Bible the cloud is an image of the presence of God. He accompanied the people during the Exodus in the shape of a cloud. In the Sinai he appeared surrounded by clouds. And when the temple of Jerusalem was inaugurated, it is said that his presence filled the temple like a mist. And that's also why the Gospel says that Jesus in his ascension was enveloped in a cloud. The cloud is something that you see and that prevents you from seeing. That's why it's the image of God, which is revealed to us and at the same time is hidden from us. Or rather it's revealed to us as a mystery; its presence is an emptiness, and its being is a void to the senses. What is said in this passage is that they were enveloped by the mystery of God."

REBECA: "They were scared because that thing enveloped them, but they shouldn't have been scared because they were being enveloped by a loving God, who was saying that Jesus was his beloved Son and that they should listen to him because he was going to talk to them about love."

I: "Christ is the word of God made flesh on earth, the message of God that we should love one another. That's the word that the cloud says we must hear."

OSCAR: "We must hear it and obey it."

MARCELINO: "Here we too are enveloped in that cloud of God telling us to listen to Jesus, not listen to God, because he doesn't talk to us directly. He talks to us through Jesus. With that word, which is love, we're going to be transfigured like him, when all of humanity is unified, and we're going to transfigure the world, because even his clothes were filled with light."

After the voice spoke, they saw that Jesus was alone. They kept silent, and they said nothing to anyone about what they had seen.

LAUREANO: "Because if they told it the others would think they were crazy."

WILLIAM: “I believe it was for the same reason that he told them earlier, when they spoke of the Messiah: ‘Do not say that I am the Messiah.’ It was a secret they had to keep because of the repression.”

I: “Yes, first they found out that he was the Messiah; afterwards he revealed to them that as the Messiah he had to suffer and die; now he makes them see that through his death he would have a glorious transformation and all this was the same messianic secret that they had to keep. They would tell it after the resurrection.”

OLIVIA: “And maybe they wouldn't understand it till then. Because when Jesus told them he had to suffer they didn't understand him, and the glory of Jesus they saw here was the glory of his suffering and death.”

Young IVAN, Olivia's son: “Maybe they fell asleep and dreamed all this.”

I: “It seems that this whole story is purely symbolical. The mountain talked about here wouldn't be any mountain in Palestine. It's a new Sinai where God, by means of a new Moses, gives a new law, the law of love. Peter talks about building some huts or tents because the prophets had said that, with the Messiah, God would live again in a tent in the midst of his people, as in the Exodus. We've already read in the Prologue to the Gospel of Saint John that, with Christ, God ‘planted his tent in the midst of us.’ Peter ‘didn't know what he was saying’ because they couldn't stay there, they had to begin the new Exodus toward liberty.”

MARCELINO: “This community is already on the move, and God is in the midst of our huts.”

57.

“He Who Is Not Against Us Is with Us”

(Luke 9:49–50)

Then John said to him: “Master, we have seen one who in your name cast out evil spirits; and we forbade him, because he was not one of us.” But Jesus said to him: “Do not forbid him: for he who is not against us is with us.”

ALEJO: “That's very timely, because there are so many people now who aren't Christians, or don't call themselves Christians, and they do great social work, make great revolutions, you might say great miracles. And over and over again they've told us Christians not to have anything to do with them. Here Christ tells us that anyone that works for the cause of others is on the side of us Christians.”

His mother: “The ones that didn't have Christian spirit were the disciples, who rejected that person who was doing very good things.”

I: “This Gospel tells us that a person's not being a Christian doesn't matter: that person can be with us also; because our cause is the cause of humanity.”

WILLIAM: “While there are others who are really against us. And there are some who try to pass themselves off as disciples of Christ and do evil to and exploit their neighbor; and there are others who, without calling themselves disciples, do good.”

Another one: “And there are some too who confuse the issue by doing good. Like that spy from Security, disguised as a schoolteacher who was doing social things with the help of Caritas, and we had to prevent him from going on doing stupid things. That guy, passing himself off as a Christian,

was doing harm, and we had to stop him, and we did. It's the opposite of the one in the Gospel who was doing good without being a disciple of Jesus."

FELIPE: "That man was a Christian because he cast out devils in the name of Jesus, and so he was a disciple."

I: "He wasn't a disciple, for John has told Jesus he wasn't a disciple, and that's why they forbade him."

ELVIS: "He didn't belong to the group, but he was doing the things that Jesus was doing, which is what's important."

MARCELINO: "Of course he believed in Jesus, because he used the name of Jesus."

LAUREANO: "And I believe he was really a disciple of Jesus that was going around there by himself, and the other disciples didn't know he was a disciple, but Jesus knew. And just because he was a disciple of Jesus he worked miracles. I believe there are right now people like that, and the Christians don't know that those people are disciples of Jesus too."

PANCHO: "Communists? They don't use Jesus' name."

LAUREANO: "They use the name of freedom, which is the same thing."

PANCHO: "They're against Jesus."

LAUREANO: "If they're not against the poor, they're not against Jesus. They're not against us."

OLIVIA: "What I'd like to know is why those disciples of Jesus were against that man who was doing good. Maybe just because he wasn't in a church crossing himself. But he was working against evil, he was casting out the devil. There's only evil and good, and he was doing good, so that means he was on the side of Jesus. I don't see why the others were against him, simply because the man wasn't an apostle."

TOMAS PEÑA, turning to me: "The first word by him that you read in the Book? Say it…. That's the one I want to talk about."

I read: "Do not forbid him: for he who is not against us is with us."

TOMAS: "That's what I was going to tell you, that what he was doing was correct. He's with us, or really with the whole community. Because Jesus is with us: he's with the whole community. So he was doing the right thing, like it says there. If you're with the community you're with God too, you're not for evil, don't you think? And everybody who's not doing evil is in favor of us."

A cousin of the Guevaras, who has come to visit them: "And how did it happen he wasn't with Jesus, he hadn't wanted to become a disciple of his?

This is a legitimate question.”

I: “Who knows, he probably had his reasons, and Jesus respects those reasons.”

TOMAS: “You could also say that that man who, without being a Christian, is driving out the devil, the devils, is showing us that any one of us can do the same, having the right faith in God.”

LAUREANO: “Having it or even not having it.”

FELIPE: “Communion with people, that's being with Jesus, and not having exploitation among people (or among ourselves, the apostles; let us apostles not exploit each other either).”

I: “It's possible that that man was caring for a sick man. The Gospel doesn't make much distinction between being possessed by the devil and illnesses; there's the case of a bedevilled man that Saint Matthew calls ‘epileptic’; and there's the case of a hunchbacked woman of whom Jesus says that she had been ‘tied by Satan.’ And how is it that he was curing in the name of Jesus? I think he was simply doing what Jesus was doing.”

ELVIS: “And Jesus doesn't divide men into people who are Christians and people who aren't. People who are driving out the devil, people who are driving evil out of the world: those are the people who are on our side, the people who are on the side of our community.”

ALEJANDRO: “And Jesus here presents his church as very extensive.”

58.

Nicodemus Visits Jesus

(John 3:1–21)

A group of us from Solentiname went to celebrate Mass in a settlement on the opposite shore, reached by going up the Papaturro River. The humble little church is in the middle of a cacao grove, and we discussed the Gospel while a strong wind shook the cacao trees. Some monkeys howled in the distance.

We read that a Pharisee called Nicodemus, who was an “important man,” went at night to visit Jesus. Jesus said to him:

> *To tell the truth, he who is not born again cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus asked him: “But how is it possible that an already grown man can be born again? Can he perhaps enter his mother again to be born again?”*

I said it appeared that this was a secret interview.

A *campesino* from Papaturro: “Since he was a Pharisee and an important man, maybe he was afraid to be seen with Jesus.”

OLIVIA: “He needed to put aside hypocrisy and become converted to love. The Pharisees had a religion without love. Nicodemus can't understand how you can be born again: it's when a new consciousness is created in you; then you become a new person.”

“A change of life; since it's a new life he calls it a new birth.”

ELVIS: “It's the change from selfishness to love, and from a society based on selfishness to a society based on love, which means the kingdom of God.

For a new society we need a new humanity, like born again. Only somebody who's been transformed, somebody new, can enter the kingdom."

JULIO: "To be born again is to be like a child. For the child there isn't any black or white, everything's alike, we're all equal. Among grown-ups, the rich never go to sit with the poor: the rich over there and the poor over here. That kingdom is the kingdom of equality, and to enter it we adults have to be like children again, we have to be born again."

NATALIA, the village midwife: "When you were born you were born innocent, right? You don't know anything evil. Then when you reach a certain age you pick up every evil thing. That's why when you become good it's like you were born again from your mother's womb. That old and very important man was very different from the way he'd been born."

OLIVIA: "It seems to me that to be born again is to live in a community of love. We can be poor and selfish, and not have love for others or solidarity, and then we belong to the old society. If we live in unity, it's because we've been born again. If we're not united it's because we're not reborn, we go on being the same."

OSCAR: "Man, I was just thinking here that you're born from your mother; but you've got to be born again to enter into the kingdom. You're born and you come out innocent of everything, but the kingdom of God is a different society, with different people. And it seems to me baptism is so we'll be born again, right?"

And Jesus answered him: "To tell the truth, Anyone who is not born of water and the spirit cannot enter the kingdom of God."

"It means that birth is more of the spirit than of anything else. Because the first birth is a birth of the flesh. The second one is more important because it's so that we can become good, receive the spirit."

OSCAR: "The spirit must come to you besides being bathed with the water, like when Jesus got baptized the spirit came through the air. Then that baptism with the water and the spirit is the same as Jesus', it seems to me."

I: "It's receiving the spirit of God."

OSCAR: "Right."

"Water washes, but baptism must wash us with the spirit of love, a spirit that will purify us of the spirit of selfishness."

JULIO: “I understand that the baptism that Jesus talks about is a washing away of all the filth in people, all injustice, so we won't have a selfish society. A change of mind, then.”

I: “John the Baptist had said he was baptizing with water (a mere ritual) but that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the spirit of God, which means love. At the end of this Mass we're going to baptize some children and that's why we have this water here, but we haven't come to carry out a mere ritual but to incorporate these children into a community so that they may receive the spirit of love.”

GLORIA: “Religion by itself, like the Pharisees’ religion, doesn't change society. It doesn't end injustices, exploitation. Christ is telling this Nicodemus (who was a Pharisee) that we must renew ourselves in love, which is the same as being born in the spirit, and which is the same as making ourselves new people. That's the only way we can create a new society.”

> *“What is born of the flesh is flesh; what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be surprised that I say to you: ‘Everyone must be born again.’”*

OSCAR: “As I understand it, it's clear to us all right now, anybody can feel it, we're seeing here that we're illuminated by the Holy Spirit. We're saying things that are very important, and you realize that it's the Spirit that's coming into you.”

WILLIAM: “The Spirit of God that has been given to us, and that makes us transmit to others that Spirit.”

“As I see it, this man had his religion but it was a very backward religion. And Christ tells him that those rituals are something purely human, ‘what is born of the flesh is flesh,’ and that that can't change the world. Only love can change the world. That's why they have to be born again, from the Spirit, which means from love.”

WILLIAM: “And Jesus makes a distinction between the flesh and the spirit; the flesh dies but the spirit doesn't die, the spirit is what gives life to the flesh. ‘And what is born of the Spirit is spirit’: the new man, born of the Spirit, doesn't die either.”

I added that, in fact, in the Bible spirit and life are the same thing. Jesus elsewhere, in the same Gospel according to Saint John, says that “the Spirit

is the one that gives life, and the body by itself is useless."

> *The wind blows where it wishes; you hear the noise that it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So also are all those who are born of the Spirit*.

I said that in Hebrew, as also in Greek, the same word is used to say "wind" and "spirit." The spirit was the breath of life and they imagined it like air. And here Jesus is playing with the two meanings of the same word. I said too that in the Bible the spirit of God or the Holy Spirit is the breath of God instilled in us. God blew that spirit into the first man, giving life to him. Every liberating action of God in history appears as if caused by that spirit (the urge for freedom that is in humankind). That is what moved the prophets to denounce injustice and oppression. And it seemed to me that Oscar was right when he said that spirit is the one that we're hearing talking here. That's the wind we hear but we don't know where it comes from, and it blows where it wishes.

OSCAR: "The way I see it, the Spirit is like that, like the wind, we just hear it. We don't know where the Spirit's born, where it comes from, or where it's going to wind up from now on. It's invisible, but we're feeling it like we feel the wind. In every answer we give when we're discussing the Bible we're feeling it. We speak through the Spirit, not through the flesh, for we're not educated or important people. This wind is love too, the spirit is love, and that's what makes us speak here, and we don't know where it comes from. It's speaking through us. I don't know how to explain it."

I: "Why, you've explained it very well. The Spirit is speaking through you. It blows where it wishes, and now it has chosen to blow here in this humble village of Papaturro."

OLIVIA: "I think it's also compared with the wind because the wind goes far, far away, so swift, for it goes thousands of miles, and it's like the spirit carrying the word of God, it goes invisible like the wind that goes wherever it wants, to the desert, to the mountain, wherever they want to listen to it and understand it. It goes traveling like a wind, like the wind that goes without stopping."

"This wind that's blowing here maybe comes from Solentiname, and who knows where it got there from," said JULIO, while we heard the strong wind shaking the cacao trees.

I: “It's come from very far away, this wind that we're feeling here and Jesus too says we don't know where it's going.”

OSCAR: “It's endless. Because just as it blew here, it'll go and blow wherever it wants and it always keeps going.”

WILLIAM: “It keeps going in history changing humanity and we don't know how far that change is going to get to in the future.”

“The Spirit is love, which is among us, and it's changing the world; you can feel it, but it's mysterious. And what's born from this Spirit, the new person, is free like the wind is free. The Pharisees weren't free; they were enslaved by their laws and their religious rules. Jesus is telling them to get rid of those traditions and be free like the wind that blows wherever it wants to.”

> *Then Nicodemus asked him again: “How can this be?” Jesus answered him: “You who are a great teacher in Israel, you don't know these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know and we are witnesses of what we have seen; but you all do not believe what we tell you. If you do not believe me when I talk to you about the things of this world, how are you going to believe me if I talk to you about the things of heaven?”*

I said it seemed as though Jesus was speaking to him with a certain irony. It's as if he said to him: “You who are a doctor of theology.”

OLIVIA: “And in spite of what Jesus said we still go on with the same religion of not eating meat on Friday, and if they kill some poor guy somewhere, who cares! They see that the candles are lighted to say the rosary. But if the people are going hungry, that's the will of God! And that's why Christ was telling them things couldn't go on like that. It's better to fight against injustice and not keep on with that false religion, all that praying and shouting, the way we used to have it and many people still have it in many places. A bunch of people fasting with hard hearts.”

I: “And it seems that Jesus is saying to Nicodemus: ‘We are speaking of the injustices that we have seen, of which we are witnesses, and you don't believe us.’”

“It seems *that* man was, as we say, a Somoza follower.”

I: “Why?”

“Well, wasn't he an important guy there in Israel?”

I: “Jesus says that if they don't believe him when he talks to them about the things of this world, things that they're seeing every day, how would they believe him if he talked to them about the things of heaven? So Jesus is talking about the things of the earth, about the change he wanted here on earth, of the new birth here. He's not talking about heaven, because that would be useless and they wouldn't even understand him.”

OSCAR: “I see it this way: This guy was important, he was with the others of his own class, and he was defending injustice. And when Jesus speaks to him about that injustice that everybody can see, he makes out he doesn't understand. And he asks and asks, and he was clinging to his religion, a kind of false religion, and that's why he doesn't understand him.”

TERESITA, William's wife: “With simple people Jesus didn't have that problem. This man who's very educated is asking him a lot of questions because he doesn't understand him.”

OSCAR: “Hell, it's just like now: some bastard is exploiting people, and somebody comes up to tell him he shouldn't do that. He makes out he doesn't understand and so he asks thousands of questions. That's the way that bastard seems to me.”

> *No one has risen to heaven except the one who came down from heaven, that is to say, the Son of Man, who is in heaven*.

ALEJANDRO: “He tells him nobody can talk about heaven if he hasn't gone up there. There's not a single one who's gone up, there's only one who's come down, and he's the only one who can tell how it is.”

OLIVIA: “And that's a nice phrase of Jesus’, right? We really want to be saved by doing crazy things, far from God's commandment, to love our neighbor like ourselves, which we don't like. And we do a lot of things that God doesn't ask us to do, many religious duties but not what he asks. That's why that's nice, that phrase that nobody's been in heaven except him; and he's not talking about the things of heaven, he's talking about loving his neighbor right here on earth.”

I: “So it seems that Jesus is telling him that just because of their religious concerns (about heaven) they don't understand things of the earth, how to change the world here. The only one who knows about the things of heaven is Jesus, and what he's talking about is a change on earth, and that's why he came down.”

OSCAR: “So we refuse to understand what the world is. If we're going to be asking questions, what's up there, in heaven, the thing's a mess. I'm all mixed up.”

I: “And maybe he wanted to get out of it, right?”

> *And just as Moses raised up the serpent in the desert, the Son of Man must also be raised up, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish, but will have eternal life*.

I explained that when the serpents were biting the Israelites in the desert, Moses raised up a bronze serpent, and anyone who looked at it was cured.

“Man, it seems to me you can apply this to our people who are suffering from hunger and from the exploitation of the rich, and you see it's like a serpent biting you. It seems to me if you see the things that are going on and you understand how oppressed you are, you can get free. Jesus says it's him you have to look to because he's the victim of the injustices and sin. Seeing him, the people are watching their own oppression, the serpent that's biting them. I don't know if what I'm saying makes any sense but that's what came to my mind.”

I said that what he had said seemed very sensible to me, and I added that in the Gospel according to Saint John “eternal life” doesn't mean life in heaven (Jesus is saying here that he's not talking about the things of heaven) but a life you can lead now here on earth. John himself says in one of his letters: “I have written to you so that you will realize that you have eternal life,” although it's a life that presupposes also a triumph over death.

A *campesino* from the village: “It looks like we have to get involved in politics, but it seems to me that our politics ought to be the politics of the Son of God.”

JULIO: “So anybody who's not political is not a Christian. We ought to fight for the common good, the good of everybody.”

“Not like the politicians that govern us now, that if we take just a tiny step to one side, they screw us.”

I: “The politics of the Bible is the communion of all, with all things in common, and for that we need this new birth. We must cast off the old (the people of the old society), says Saint Paul, and clothe ourselves in the new, with no distinctions between Jew and Greek, masters and slaves. Che also used to talk a lot about this new person, the one for others; the one of the

society of the future. He will have very different characteristics, he says, he's already being born, but his image isn't finished yet, and it can't be. And Che himself in his life clothed himself quite a bit in this new image."

OSCAR: "There's no point in talking about heaven, wanting now to go up to heaven to see what kind of a place it is; I think we've got enough on our hands to see what kind of a place the earth is."

OLIVIA: "I believe the things of the earth are the same as the things of heaven."

"Well, when people love each other there's a community of love, and that's heaven: where there's no divisions, no selfishness, where there's no deceit, that's where heaven is, that *is* heaven, that's glory."

"It's more joyful. It's a way of changing life and making it better."

OSCAR: "If we begin to be in love we already know heaven because that's where it comes from."

I: "What Olivia says is very good, that the things of earth are the same as the things of heaven, for we see that Jesus, who came down from heaven as it says here and who 'is in heaven,' didn't come to talk about anything different from the things of earth."

OSCAR: "Ernesto, that means that we're getting to know heaven, right? Because those bastards lived on earth and didn't know what there was on earth, they didn't see the evil. Everything bad they took for good, they were hypocrites, right? And now there's been progress and many of us now know what heaven is, what's earth and what's heaven."

I: "We're receiving that spirit that blows where it wishes, and we don't know where it comes from. Well, it comes from heaven."

> *For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life*.

FELIPE: "It seems to me, then, that to believe in Jesus is to believe in love. It seems to me that if you have faith but don't have love, it's no good, you have to believe in love."

WILLIAM: "And it's clear that it's a faith accompanied by action. Those who believe in him work and therefore don't perish; they work so that they won't perish and so that others won't perish. Love and eternal life are the same. Those who believe in him are the ones who practice justice and love, and therefore they have that life."

I: “It seems to me that humanity is a complete organism, a single body, and it has eternal life. But only the individuals who are united with humanity, those who love, share in the life of this body. They do not perish, though they die individually. Those who separate from this body, the enemies of unity, are those who perish. This doctrine I heard from a Chilean monk who belonged to the M.I.R. [Movimiento Izquierdista Revolucionario, Revolutionary Leftist Movement].

ALEJANDRO: “To fight to change the world is to believe in Christ.”

> *God did not send his Son to the world to condemn the world but so that the world could be saved through him. Whoever believes in the Son of God is not condemned; but whoever does not believe has already been condemned for not believing in the only Son of God*.

FELIPE: “It contradicts a belief of old people, that the world, when it's past mending, is going to be destroyed in a last judgment. But here we see that there isn't any last judgment. Jesus came to mend the world and not to condemn it. Whoever is condemned, it's because that's what they want, those who don't have love (they're the ones that don't believe) and right away they're condemned by the people.”

WILLIAM: “They separate from the people, they're cut off from the union of humanity which is all one, and that separation is condemnation.”

> *Those who do not believe have been condemned, because when light came to the world they preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil. All those who work evil hate the light and do not approach the light so that their evil works will not be discovered*.

I: “The judgment already exists in this life, as Felipe says, and one who doesn't believe in Christ is one who doesn't love, for somewhere else, speaking of this judgment, he says: ‘I was hungry and you did not feed me, I was homeless and you did not give me lodging, I was without clothing and you did not give me any.’ And Jesus says here that these oppressors don't want their oppression to be discovered, they love the darkness, that is, they want the people to be kept in ignorance, and they hate the light: they don't want their exploitation to be discovered, and they make religion itself serve to cover up reality.”

“I think the light is the truth, because the truth is what brings all the injustice out into the light, so the people can see it, right?”

I: “In the Gospel according to Saint John, Jesus says he is the Truth and he also says he is the Light; the truth and the light are the same thing.”

WILLIAM: “Where there's light there's a gathering. Where there are people there's light: a lamp, a fire. I see the light too as a symbol of the human community, the union of humanity. And darkness is separation and solitude.”

FELIPE: “So not to be in darkness is to be in a gathering.”

WILLIAM: “And Jesus says that those who work evil hate the light, because anybody who's going to commit an assault, a robbery, does it in the dark. And so too people who now exploit us don't want the truth to be told in the papers or on the radio, they even forbid books, so that the country is left in the dark.”

“The government has seen to it that the big strike in Managua won't be mentioned on the radio or in the newspapers. They don't want light, so they can cover up the evil they do. But the workers’ action, what it's trying to do is clear things up.”

I: “And maybe Jesus has gone on now to speak of light and darkness because he's speaking at night. That man has come to see him at night and surely in secret, because he was an important man, a member of the Jewish Supreme Council, and there was an antagonism between people of his class and Jesus like the one between darkness and light. Of course, in that night interview Nicodemus received the light, for afterwards he defended Jesus in the Supreme Council of the Sanhedrin.”

But those who live in accordance with the truth approach the light so that it can be seen that God is a part of what they are doing.

“If we're in favor of a social change, we like what's being said here.”

“I see that here they're talking about practice. It says: ‘What they are doing.’ So they're not just praying.”

OLIVIA: “Jesus isn't talking about a God in heaven who's far from us but a God who is love. To see that God is a part of what they're doing is to see love.”

I: “And the God that Jesus presents is not in heaven, as Olivia says, but in what people are doing. If we want to look for God, that's where we must

look for him, in the liberating practice of people.”

59.

Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

(John 4:1–42)

“Give me water.” Then the Samaritan woman said to him: “How is it that you, who are a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan, for water?”

TOMAS: “Jesus asked for water, but it seems to me he didn't ask because he was thirsty but to be talking with the woman, because he wanted to give her a different kind of water.”

LAUREANO: “There's also a lesson in the fact that he went to ask a woman of an enemy people for water. For Jesus there were no divided peoples; he belonged to all the peoples. And he teaches us not to be divided by nationalisms.”

I: “He didn't care about religious differences. The reason why the Jews had no contact with the Samaritans is because they were of a different religion.”

OSCAR: “Well, it seems that Jews and Samaritans didn't like each other, and she was surprised, amazed to see that an enemy was talking to her, asking her for something, and as they talked, she felt those words were getting to her heart. Then she got sincere with him, and maybe she herself didn't know what she said at that moment of truth.”

Then Jesus answered her: “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is asking you for water you would surely ask me, and I would give you the water of life.”

TOMAS: “These words are as deep as a well.”

OSCAR: “It was there that she recognized it wasn't an enemy that was talking to her but that what she needed, which was love and peace, he was giving it to her.”

MYRIAM, Olivia's daughter: “The gift that God gives is love.”

TERESITA: “And he himself is that gift that God gives. He tells her that if she knew what God is giving, and who it is that's talking to her—It's the same thing; the one that's talking to her is love.”

NATALIA: “I think maybe the water that he offers is going to take away their sins and injustices.”

Jesus answered her: “All those who drink of this water will be thirsty again; but those who drink of the water that I give will never be thirsty again.”

OLIVIA: “Surely because people who sin do it out of desire, because they're thirsty, for all desire is a thirst. And he was going to put an end to that thirst; she was going to be satisfied.”

ALEJANDRO, her son: “She surely had great capacity for love and she hadn't been satisfied. She was thirsty for love, thirsty to love.”

OSCAR: “I think she didn't love, because sin is not loving. She never knew about love. But, as Alejandro says, she had that thirst. She lacked love, like someone who is thirsty needs water. She didn't love; she wanted to be loved.”

WILLIAM: “I think we must understand that thirst to be like the deep thirst of every human being, which is basically the thirst for love, but all other human failings too, including physical needs, are part of that thirst.”

I: “Including the physical need for water, right? For we don't feel it, we who are on these islands surrounded by fresh water, but it's felt by the poor people in areas around Managua and many other places.”

For the water that I shall give them will gush forth like a spring within them to give them eternal life.

OLIVIA: “He says the water he will give will gush forth inside of you. He gives it but it's born from us. It's God's very life that he'll give us, which is love, and that's what he calls eternal life, because it's God's life. But it's going to come out of us, it won't be stagnant, it'll be a fountain, a fountain of life.”

ELVIS: “All those people who are struggling for freedom are carrying the water of life everywhere like a fountain. Freedom is like a river of life for humanity, that empties into eternal life.”

Then the woman said to him: “Lord, give me that water, so that I won't be thirsty again, or have to come here to this well to get water.”
Jesus said to her: “Go and call your husband, and then come here.”

TOMAS: “She was already thinking different. She was already looking for the good path. If she'd been thinking like that before, she wouldn't have asked for that water. She sees that Jesus can give her happiness.”

OSCAR: “It's very nice. As a Jew he'd asked her for water. Now she, as a Samaritan, is asking him.”

ROGER: “That woman had failed several times, had had several husbands, and the one she had then wasn't much. So her need was an urgent one. She was thirsty for love. For a love that would leave her satisfied.”

BOSCO: “Isn't it that she's still thinking of material water and maybe has believed that he may be a kind of magician, who could spare her from carrying water, which was something very hard for her.”

I: “It's possible, above all keeping in mind the magical mentality of that time. The Samaritans had a jumble of pagan religions, and they believed in many myths…. But even now there are many who understand the Gospel with that same magical mentality.”

WILLIAM: “She was bored by all that water-carrying every day.”

OLIVIA: “It's clear that what she wants is to solve that well problem, because she says it's so she won't have to go back to that well. And of course she was right. But we have to notice too that everybody was carrying that water. All she wanted to do was get rid of that problem of hers and she wasn't thinking about the others.”

I: “That's a real problem that humanity has had. It's been especially the lot of women for many centuries to carry water. And that was a woman who was tired of doing it. But as Olivia says, that's a social problem. It's being solved, even though there are still very many places where it hasn't been solved. Right here in Solentiname the women or the children have to lug the water buckets home. The gift that Jesus was bringing was to solve all the problems of humanity, including the water problem. It's possible that in that

place where he asked for water next to a well there's a pipe of running water, and that's a product of socialization.”

OSCAR: “But what good does it do them if they're always thirsty?”

FELIPE: “With regard to Oscar's question, what good does the water pipe do them if they're always thirsty: it seems to me that for us not to have any kind of thirst the water pipes ought to be in our consciences too.”

I: “What do you say to the answer, Oscar?”

OSCAR: “It's fine by me.”

I: “He says the two things have to go together, that material abundance alone isn't enough. But we can't talk about love if women still have to lug water and are enslaved in many ways, and so are men.”

OLIVIA: “But it's because that love doesn't exist yet that we have slavery of women and also of men. With enough love you can have everything, even water.”

OSCAR: “But it seems to me the only thing we've accomplished in many places is avoiding lugging the water bucket on your shoulder, and thirst goes right on there, which means they're not united. Or maybe they're united but they don't have enough love and nothing gets cured because thirst still exists.”

IVAN: “But Jesus had offered to quench her thirst.”

OSCAR: “Of course he did, as Jesus says, but not like they're talking about water pipes and drinkable water. We need something more than that.”

DONALD: “But if you're in an exploited town, you have to be paying for water, every drop of water that you use to bathe in. You don't earn enough to eat and you have to pay for water, and light.”

OSCAR: “That's the catch! It's a system of exploitation. Even though you're spared the carrying of the water bucket, exploitation always exists. That's what Jesus is talking about.”

I: “Oscar's right, in that place in Samaria maybe there are now water pipes but that won't mean that slavery has ended, even though that system shouldn't be called slavery but capitalism.”

BOSCO: “And it's strange that when she asks him for that water, so she won't have to be carrying it, he says to her: ‘Well, go and call your husband.’”

TERESITA, smiling: “It must be because he saw that the husband wasn't helping her to carry the water.”

OSCAR: “No, Bosco, you have to put the bucket on your shoulder to help the woman. I imagine that what Jesus wanted is for her to tell the truth. There her thirst got a little quenched when she told the truth, when she told him that she had no husband. She told him the truth, that she had no husband. She had to be a slave, then. That thirst is killing her, and when she says this, her thirst is a little bit quenched; and she doesn't realize it.”

NATALIA: “But he told her that because he knew she didn't have one, a real husband. She had often looked for love, and she was already bored with lugging that water.”

OLIVIA: “Jesus knew she had a lover. He wasn't her legal husband but she had to love him, and he probably saw that even between them there wasn't much love. If there had been more love there wouldn't have been all those water trips.”

OSCAR: “When she told Jesus about her intimate life she took away her thirst. When Jesus mentioned her husband she recognizes that she doesn't have one, and he says to her: You've said it well. And it's because she had no husband, because that bum she had was a lover. And maybe they didn't even love each other; they only lived together to satisfy their desire, their sin. And she wasn't going to be thirsty any more.”

LAUREANO: “Jesus told her to call her husband because he wanted to give the water to them both together.”

TOMAS: “I think he saw that the woman was already finding what she wanted, the pure love she'd been looking for. At that moment she felt different.”

OSCAR: “Let's go on reading, Ernesto; this is very interesting.”

The woman answered him: “I have no husband.” Jesus then said to her: “You are right to say you have no husband; because you have had five husbands and the one you now have is not your husband. In this you have said the truth.”

I: “Jesus makes her see that she really has had no love in her life.”

LAUREANO: “Maybe she's had too much love.”

I: “Too much thirst for love.”

TERESITA: “She's confused about love.”

I: “She was a woman divorced several times, and she was probably an unfortunate woman, oppressed by men. At that time men could reject

women but women couldn't reject men. And she had seen her home destroyed several times. And it seems that the Gospel according to St. John is furnishing a symbol with this woman of Samaria. The prophets had spoken about the idolatries of that same land of Samaria as prostitution. They describe it like a wife who has forgotten her first husband, Yahweh, and who goes after her lovers, who are idols. But Isaiah had also prophesied that later Israel would no longer be called the 'Husbandless One,' and that 'the earth will have a husband.' And the Gospel in the passage before the meeting with the Samaritan woman shows us John the Baptist saying that Jesus is the Bridegroom."

On hearing this the woman said to him: "I see that you are a prophet. Our Samaritan ancestors worshipped God here on this hill, but you Jews say that Jerusalem is the place where we must adore him."

I: "The prophets were the ones that denounced injustices, which were the idolatry or prostitution of Israel. And now it seems that this is no longer a woman with a problem of her private life. The Samaritan woman is Samaria that has recognized in Jesus the voice of the prophets."

OSCAR: "There she's realizing that it's not a question of a water pipe that they were going to put in their houses to avoid carrying water. Man, that water fountain is beginning to show. What Jesus meant, I figure, is that you have to give yourself to other people with love: sacrificing yourself to put an end to slavery and exploitation; and we can do a lot through the people. That's what Jesus meant, he wanted to tell the Samaritan woman to give herself, not to go around with falseness, and to love. Many people in this country have died for this cause. What Jesus was coming to do was to bring us out of slavery."

I: "The main antagonism between the Jews and the Samaritans was about the temple. The Jews were saying it was necessary to adore God in the Temple of Jerusalem, and the Samaritans that it was on their hill where there was a temple that rivalled that of Jerusalem and that was very close to the place where Jesus was talking with the Samaritan woman. She's asking him which of the two religions is the true one."

Jesus answered her: "Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will adore the Father without having to come to this hill or go to

Jerusalem.”

TOMAS: “He wants to tell her that God is everywhere, not just in Jerusalem and on that hill, and that you can adore him anywhere.”

LAUREANO: “I think there's no need to have divisions among people. When everybody's united and loves each other, God will be there with them and they won't have to go anywhere to adore him.”

“Not even to the churches?” somebody asks him. And he answers: “People gather in the churches.”

I: “The first Christians had no temples. ‘Church’ in Greek is a secular word that means ‘meeting.’ I have read that in the Old Testament also the Bible uses scarcely any religious words, only lay words that were later given a religious sense. For example, the word ‘cult’ came from a military term and was equivalent to our word ‘militance.’ And in the New Testament, when religious words are used, it's to give them back a secular sense, as when Saint Paul says that the temple is people.”

MANUEL: “That's why we don't think it's bad to smoke in church, and we're smoking while we're making these commentaries, because this place isn't sacred. What's sacred for us is the unity we have here.”

FELIPE: “Men, women, children, old people, those are the sacred temples of God, and these are the temples that are respected in Cuba.”

OLIVIA: “But here in Nicaragua that time that some groups of young Christians seized the lecterns to demand freedom for political prisoners, there were people that said they were profaning the temple.”

I: “One of the accusations made against Jesus when they condemned him to death was that he had said he was going to destroy the temple. The evangelists say that was slander and that they couldn't prove it; but that accusation may have had some basis, and they deny it because they were very insistent on defending Jesus. At least it's clear that he was against the temple; he not only had called it a thieves’ cave but he'd said not one stone would be left upon another. He'd also said that God was already abandoning the temple. And to the Samaritan woman here he was announcing its immediate disappearance. To say this and to say that he would cause the destruction is almost the same. The Jews’ slander would be to say he was planning to do it with terrorist methods.”

FELIPE: “The Jews, like the Samaritans, were very alienated through religion. Jesus tells the woman that's going to end, that God's going to be

worshipped everywhere where others are loved."

I: "Christ says that neither of the two religions are going to be needed, but he doesn't talk of a new religion."

OSCAR: "Well, it seems to me that Christ wanted to show the woman that it's not worthwhile to worry about religion, that God's not interested in the temple, in people going to worship him at a fixed place, like a hill or the church of Jerusalem. It seems it doesn't matter to him. We're here in this church and he doesn't care about the church, as a building. What he cares about is for all of us to love him. Now that's really to be knowing what love is, what God is. It seems they only loved themselves, you see? And Christ there was showing them that to love God they had to love others, all the people, or really the whole world."

MANUEL: "But right after that we see he makes a distinction between the Samaritans and the Jews":

> *"You Samaritans do not know what you worship: but we know what we worship; for freedom comes from the Jews."*

FELIPE: "I think the world has always had a lot of doctrines; some go one way and some the other, and it's the same thing nowadays. But there's only one that carries the people forward, toward freedom. And Jesus must have been conscious that in the Jews there was really a true doctrine of freedom, of complete freedom, in the writings they had. And that's the difference he sees with the other religions."

ALEJANDRO: "Of course, freedom as an idea comes from the Jewish religion. But he just says it comes from there. It comes in order to spread everywhere. Freedom is for everybody, people of all the religions and people without religion, too."

I: "The whole Bible is a constant denunciation of injustice and a constant defense of poor people, widows, orphans; and it is constantly setting up the goal of humanity, a perfect society. That's the difference between the Bible and all the pagan religions, which considered the world as finished, unable to change, and they were on the side of the status quo, oppression. (And the Samaritans had a mixture of various pagan religions.) What Marx says, that God always appears on the side of the dominant power, is very true of the god of most religions, but not of the God of the Bible. Although in practice, when the Jews were unfaithful to the God of the Bible, they also had an

alienating religion, allied with power. And that's what Christ came to fight against.”

OSCAR: “Ernesto, this question is bothering me. It was from the Jews that freedom came, says Christ. But why did freedom come from there? If freedom came from there, why did they screw him? The Jews knew the true God, who was justice; the Samaritans didn't know the God they worshiped and they had no idea of who he was, but in spite of worshiping a god in ignorance, they weren't sure of who they were worshiping. Christ went to a woman who's a Samaritan, and it seems he knew they were going to welcome him there with love.”

I: “The Gospel said at the beginning of this passage that the Pharisees were alarmed because Jesus was getting more popular than John the Baptist, and Jesus left Judea. It's clear that he is fleeing. He had seen the fate of John the Baptist. And then he passes through Samaria. He tells the Samaritan woman that freedom comes from the Jews, but it's a freedom that he's fleeing from.”

> *But the hour is coming, and it is here, when those who really worship the Father will worship him in spirit and in truth*.

TOMAS: “Wherever there is the spirit of love, he's being really worshiped.”

FELIPE: “That means they're not going to worship him just by word. Because many of us used to pray (and there are still a lot of people who pray that way), but it was to a God who lived who knows where. Jesus teaches that we have to love God, but in our neighbors; the one that loves his neighbors loves God.”

I: “Jesus says the hour is going to come and it has already come. That seems to be a contradiction. In another passage, speaking about his message resurrecting the dead, he says that hour will come and it has already come. The kingdom is to come and it has already come. One of the liberation theologians, Father Juan Luis Segundo, says that the Bible doesn't understand the world as an unchangeable reality but as a process in evolution, but at that time in which the concept of evolution did not exist and there were no words to express it, the Bible has to face those contradictions: something that already exists and doesn't yet exist.”

God is Spirit, and those who worship him must do so in spirit and in truth.

I: " 'God is Spirit' doesn't mean that he is immaterial. 'Spirit' to the Jews meant breath of life. The opposite of 'spirit' is not 'matter' but 'death.' God is life, and he is the one who instills life in us. His life, or spirit, which he instills in us, is love. It's the same as saying that it's the love that there is among us."

"Many rich people can worship God in the sanctuary, but they're exploiting, they're screwing humanity; then that's not true, it's a lie, a hypocrisy. They don't really worship. But there are others who don't even go into church to hear Mass. It's true of many young men who don't even mention God, and yet they go off to fight a battle to defend the oppressed, and those people, it seems to me, they do really and truly worship."

The woman said to him: "I know that the Messiah is going to come; and when he comes he will explain everything to us."

FRANCISCO: "She was a little mixed up, maybe."

ROGER: "I don't think she was mixed up. She was a woman who needed love and she was expecting that some time a messiah was going to come who was going to solve all the problems."

Jesus said to her: "I am that one, the one who is talking to you."

FELIPE: "She may always have been a little confused, because she couldn't find which religion was the truth. She was hoping somebody would come and explain it to her, but when Jesus tells her that God is now going to be worshiped without religion, she doesn't understand that. She says that when the Messiah comes, the Liberator, he'll explain everything to us; and he has to tell her: the one who is explaining this to you is already the Liberator."

I: "Among the Jews Jesus never said he was the Messiah, and he forbade anyone to say it. It's clear that it was to avoid repression, for he told it clearly to that Samaritan woman and she went and told all the people."

FRANCISCO: "She never imagined that the Messiah was going to come to where she was in the shape of an enemy that went up to her to ask for water."

OSCAR: “And she was really startled. But the truth is that Jesus approaches all of us who like her have been evil, that is, all of us who are thirsty for love.”

We later saw that the disciples came with food, but Jesus wouldn't eat, and he said to them:

My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to fulfill his work.

FELIPE: “He was very interested in the work he was doing, with that woman who had gone to inform all the people, and that's why he had no appetite. His hunger is to do the will of God. That happens with real leaders, who often forget to eat or sleep because of what they're doing.”

I: “He says that his food is to do the work of God in the kingdom. And that is also the work that God has begun since he created the world, and that Jesus is going to fulfill.”

FRANCISCO: “But Jesus is going to fulfill the work through us; he's not going to do it all by himself. And the work hasn't ended.”

ALEJANDRO: “For each of us that work will be ended only when we die.”

FRANCISCO: “Well, when life ends, then you stop working. But some will be freed, maybe those that you freed, the way Christ did with many. Many were conscientized to carry that conscientization across the centuries. When each of us dies, there our work ends, but others begin, and so that's the way the work has reached us.”

I: “The same reflection that you have made is the one that Jesus makes next, looking at the fields that were recently sown”:

You say: “It's four months until harvest”; but I say to you: Raise your eyes and see the yellow fields ready for reaping. And the reaper is paid, and he reaps a harvest for life eternal; and the sower shares in the joy of the reaper. The saying is true: “One sows and it is someone else who reaps.” I have sent you to harvest where others have worked.

LAUREANO: “All the work that's done on earth is a continuation of the work that God began. With their work the workers are fulfilling the world, or rather they continue creating the world. In society there shouldn't be anybody who doesn't work. Anyone who doesn't work doesn't eat. Right now there's one part, the biggest part, that works for everybody, and the part

that consumes most is the one that doesn't work. But work wouldn't be finished in the perfect society; the machines wouldn't run by themselves or be manufactured by themselves."

OSCAR: "What Christ comes to say, do you know what it is? That we're finally going to work the good earth that's going to give us a good harvest, while up to now we've been sowing on stones or on uncleared land and therefore the work gives us nothing. Others are working the good earth, like Cuba, where there aren't any more prejudices or divisions, and they're working like brothers and sisters; there's love among everybody and there's love for all peoples. I'm afraid I can't explain it."

I: "Jesus says that his hunger, his burning desire, is to fulfill the work of his Father, but Laureano is right: that doesn't mean we're going to stop working. When they criticized Jesus for curing a paralytic on a day of rest, he answered: 'My Father always works and I also work.' The Jews kept the Sabbath in memory of the day when God rested after the six days of creation. But according to Jesus, God has always continued with his creative work, and now he comes to help in that work, to complete the creation. And as Francisco has said: together with us."

IVAN (one of the youngest): "Does that mean that in perfect communism there's going to be no Sabbath; every day's going to be a working day?"

I: "Well, work is going to be like rest and rest will be like work. There won't be the distinction there is now between rest and work. It'll be like when you go fishing, you have fun fishing and at the same time you're doing some work."

OSCAR: "I believe the rest that God took after the creation, you know what it is? It's humankind. And our rest is the same, it's getting together. Like we are today, which is a day of rest, but it's so that we can all get together, so we can feel happy. But the body always works, right? Rest is being happy; it's looking at each other's faces and greeting each other and if possible, well, having a drink. Well, that's a rest for me, I don't know about you. Look, when I go to have a drink with another guy I feel happy. When I'm working I'm talking, but I'm working; and it's different to be at rest for an hour, and to see their faces, and to be talking, like we are now. We spend six long days of the week all split up, not seeing our friends; here we're seeing each other and greeting each other: how you doing? This is a rest that God created, to be together here. But God isn't resting, he's always giving us his spirit, pouring it out so there'll be this love among us."

OLIVIA: “I think that rest isn't simply this Sunday rest but the rest that comes from a change, because with a change we rested from the oppression we had. It isn't rest from work: because there'll be more work.”

FRANCISCO: “They used to say that in socialist countries like Cuba they're sowing on good ground. I think they're also harvesting now. Now they're trying to carry the grain somewhere else. There many people spilled their blood so they could be at ease. Now nobody's hungry.”

WILLIAM: “Rest is going to be when we all enjoy the abundance of the work of everybody. And work is going to be very joyful.”

FELIPE: “But now if you lie down to sleep and you know you don't have anything to eat, you can't rest.”

OSCAR: “That's what I want to make clear, that we've all got to get together and not be damned fools. Together we're going to make the truth win, what Jesus went to teach to those gypsies—what's the word?—Samaritans. And let's not be afraid of death; death is a passageway to life.”

LAUREANO: “*That* kind of death.”

60.

The Bread of Life

(John 6:25–29)

We read the words that, according to Saint John, Jesus said in a synagogue to the people who were following him after the multiplication of the loaves. Before beginning to comment on the first verses, JULIO GUEVARA, JUNIOR, said: “This Gospel seems real crazy. All it talks about is the bread of life and salvation and heaven and eternal life.”

> *I tell you the truth, you seek me out because you stuffed yourselves, and not because you have understood the miraculous signs. Do not work for the food that will come to an end but for the food that endures and gives you eternal life*.

ALEJANDRO: “We see clearly that those signs, feeding or curing, were to make us see how society should be organized. He wanted them to learn to perform miracles also, working all together, without exploiting each other, so there would be bread, health, and all the rest.”

OSCAR: “I think the true food he was bringing was union among all people—love. He wasn't coming just to multiply the rice and the kidney beans.”

OLIVIA: “The bread that's used up is the bread that's sought selfishly, and the bread that gives life is the bread we seek as a community. That bread produces eternal life because it produces the kingdom.”

“I want to add here something like what Doña Olivia says: and it's that for Jesus the true life is a life without injustice, and that's the life of that

bread, the community of people, which he brings. But what the system of injustice and exploitation produces is death."

I: "They hadn't understood the sign or signal of the distribution of the bread: they hadn't understood that symbol."

> *This is the food that the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has put on him his seal.*

"Us *campesinos* and illiterates always let ourselves be deceived by people who offer us a mouthful of food or anything that we'll use up quickly, even though afterwards we'll be worse off than before. And we don't let ourselves be persuaded by people that offer us a lesson to lead more of a community life, which would be the true life."

I: "That bread that doesn't last is like the distribution of grain that Somoza has just made up north, to win over the *campesinos*, with which he's not going to get anybody out of misery. On the other hand, Jesus is telling them that the miraculous food they've had hasn't solved any of their problems, that what it's all about is to change the world, to replace the system of injustice with a system of love. And that's the bread he has brought, his word, because he's the message of love that God has sent us, and that's why he says God has placed on him 'his seal,' as on a letter."

DOÑA NATALIA: "There are so many workers that are just hanging on. All that work. Earning pennies. Working exhausted there, tired out, the poor man, and they make him do all that work, and he always gives in, puts up with that. His food, rice and beans, may not be well cooked. If he doesn't work he doesn't earn. It's tough, it's tough. And Christ is saying they shouldn't put up with it."

WILLIAM: "Jesus probably had in mind all those workers who've been hanging on as Doña Natalia says, all through history. And he tells them they mustn't work for the bread that doesn't last, any more than for better salaries, as the developmentalists want. The world has to be changed. His hearers understand that he's proposing a change, when they ask him what plan he's bringing them."

> *Then they asked him: "What must we do to bring about the things that God wants us to do?" And Jesus answered them: "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he has sent."*

ESPERANZA, Olivia's daughter: “He means that anybody that comes along talking like he talks is also sent by God.”

FELIPE: “He was coming to teach that everybody ought to get together and love each other. And that's why he tells them to believe in him. If they believed in him injustice would end and the world would change.”

MANUEL: “It's that, if they believed in him, they had to believe in the whole message that he was bringing. They had first to believe in his person in order to believe in his word and to carry out his word.”

OSCAR: “And believing in him meant believing that God had sent him, that he wasn't just shooting a line about himself, that the revolution he was bringing was the will of God.”

I: “They have asked him what they should do to carry out God's plan. He doesn't answer that; he tells them that God's plan is that they believe that God sent him. He means that they must believe that he has been sent as a messiah, as a liberator, and that is also the same as believing in liberation. The listeners have understood that, and they remember the first liberation from Egyptian slavery. They tell him that Moses showed signs of being a liberator sent by God, as when he fed them ‘bread from heaven,’ and they ask Jesus what signs he can show.”

> *Jesus answered them: “I tell you the truth: It was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven; my Father is the one who gives you the true bread from heaven, because the bread that God gives is the bread that has come down from heaven and that gives life to men.”*

“As Oscar wisely said, that bread that he talks about is love, and he has come to bring love here to the earth through his message, to make us give up self-interest and seek union and communism. That message is a loaf of bread brought down from heaven to nourish us.”

OSCAR: “If all we worry about is crops and business, maybe we become more selfish and more divided. But love unites us, and that's what we must concentrate on, always love, union, companionship, not letting the others perish. Many times the more you have the more you want to have and you forget about the others; that abundance, then, doesn't give us true life; it may be that there's a lot of crops and injustice continues. They ate that manna in the desert, but it didn't change them or straighten them out.”

I: “Scripture said, as the Jews have quoted it here, that the manna was a ‘loaf from heaven,’ but Jesus tells them the revolutionary thing that it's not true that that loaf was from heaven. It has now been discovered that that manna was really a sweet, white syrup that drips from the tree called tamarind, and which the desert bedouins still eat in that region. And Jesus says: there isn't any bread like that come down from heaven. The only bread that comes from heaven is the word of love, which he is transmitting, and which will give humanity a new life.”

I am the bread that gives life. He who comes to me will never be hungry; and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

OLIVIA: “If there's love, there's no hunger. That hunger for exploitation and thirst to get more. Those ambitions are hunger and thirst, desires never satisfied. They always want to own more. But if you have love, then you're full, you're satisfied, you're happy.”

“Here in Nicaragua there's a lot of propaganda against Fidel Castro, and they say there are shortages there. What they don't think about is that whatever there is is for everybody. And the truth is that everybody's satisfied there, because nobody's in need and nobody has too much; everybody has the same. But here, no matter how rich they are, they are never satisfied; they always want more. There, in a place where there's justice, they don't have the thirst that we have here.”

I: “Not long ago I was reading a scientist who says it has been discovered that the greatest human need, the one all other needs come from, is for sociability, for cooperation; in other words, the greatest hunger and thirst of people is the hunger and thirst for love. And that's the thirst that Jesus says he has come to quench.”

WILLIAM: “And this has a lot to do with that other thing that he said, about the hunger and thirst for justice that would be satisfied.”

Everything that the Father gives me comes to me, and those who come to me I shall not throw out.

LAUREANO: “The poor, the helpless, those are the ones that the Father gave to him.”

GLORIA: “They wouldn't be the middle-class ones, because they had no confidence in him.”

ELVIS: “And it seems to me that all people struggling for justice anywhere in the world have come to Christ, even when they don't call him Christ and they don't call themselves Christians. And he doesn't throw them out. Many Christians believe that atheist revolutionaries aren't with Christ. But he says he doesn't throw them out, if they're seeking communion with other people, which means seeking him.”

NATALIA, Elvis's mother: “Anybody that receives the teaching of Christ goes where he goes and seeks union with others, and if you're united you can't be reseparated.”

FELIPE: “This seems very interesting, because there are many who know their Bible well, but they're far away from love. It's one thing to know the Scriptures and it's quite a different thing to put them into practice. A Che, a Fidel, have put them into practice.”

> *And the will of him who sent me is that I not lose any of those that he has given me but that I resurrect them on the final day. The will of my Father is that all those who look at the Son and believe in him have eternal life*.

OLIVIA: “Here he makes a promise with us, with those of us who accept his message, and it's very important, what he promises, to resurrect us all on the last day, the day of total liberation. And there wouldn't be total liberation if there wasn't also resurrection.”

ALEJANDRO: “Love makes a promise to anyone that surrenders to him. Love then takes charge of you and manages you.”

I: “Jesus has said that we cannot be lost, the will of the Father is for nobody to be lost, and we'd be lost if we were to disappear with death.”

> *At this point the Jews began to criticize Jesus, because he said: “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” And they said: “Isn't this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know his father and mother. How does he say he came down from heaven?”*

FELIPE: “It's obvious they didn't believe in him, and they didn't believe because they were expecting some kind of liberation to come from heaven, like something magical.”

GLORIA: “And above all they didn't believe in him because he was the son of a workman. They kept rubbing it in that he was the son of a

carpenter. If he'd been rich and powerful maybe it would have been easier for them to think he'd come down from heaven."

BOSCO: "Their reaction was from the idea they had of heaven, and that God is in a place where you can't reach him, but Jesus is telling them that the descent from heaven was that God came up out of the working class."

WILLIAM: "And the same way now, many religious Christians are waiting for a liberation falling down from heaven and not a liberation that rises up from the people."

BOSCO: "And imperialism encourages that religiosity so the people will keep passive facing injustices, waiting only for that salvation from above: it's enough to hear those Protestant radio programs that talk only about heaven to realize that."

Jesus said to them: "Stop criticizing. None can come to me if they are not brought by the Father that sent me; and I shall resurrect them on the last day. In the books of the prophets it is said: 'God will teach them all.' So all those who listen to the Father and learn from him come to me."

EDUARDO: "That's very strange."

GERARDO: "In the Bible God was teaching his revolutionary message to very few, practically only to the prophets. Now with the present revolutions the whole people thinks and talks like the prophets. In a country that's making its revolution, there are thousands, millions of prophets. They've been taught by the Father, although they don't know it, and they identify with Jesus."

ELVIS: "That Father who sent Jesus, who made him rise up from the people, is the same one who sends us toward Jesus, who joins us with him, and makes Jesus and the people into a single thing."

MYRIAM: "I believe all who struggle for liberation, in any part of the world, are also sent by the Father like Jesus."

LAUREANO: "They are generally persecuted and killed, but according to the words of Jesus it doesn't matter if they persecute you and kill you because on the last day you're going to be alive."

It is not that someone has seen the Father; the only one who has seen him is the one who has come from God. I tell you the truth: They who

believe in me have eternal life.

MANUEL: “To know God we must know Jesus, who is humanity.”

OSCAR: “We haven't seen him, but we've heard the word of Jesus Christ, who is the one who has seen him and has told us how he is: he's love.”

OLIVIA: “This seems to me very important, especially for us poor people who are always waiting for a salvation that will come from heaven; we settle for praying to God, and Jesus is saying: who's seen him?”

FELIPE: “It seems he wanted to tell those Jews all their practices were inventions.”

I: “He doesn't deny that God exists, but he says you can't see him.”

OLIVIA: “And you can't love him either because you can't see him. And because of that we also have this: how are we going to love God, who we can't see, if we don't love our neighbors, who we *can* see.”

I: “We can't see him but we *can* love each other and that is to know God according to Saint John. It is to possess him, as you can possess a lover.”

FELIPE: “I think he wants us to put aside all false information that we've been having about God and that has removed us from the true God, who is love.”

WILLIAM: “It's interesting that he doesn't say that anyone who believes in him *will* have eternal life, but that he *has* eternal life. So we see that eternal life is something we already have in this life.”

BOSCO: “Christ was living in the perfect society of God; just as Che left his ministry in Cuba to carry the revolution somewhere else, Christ left that heavenly society to come to preach heaven here on earth.”

I: “So that humanity can be one just as he and the Father are one, so that humanity can be like the Trinity, and have heaven be made here on earth, isn't that it?”

I am the bread that gives life that came down from heaven; those who eat this bread will live forever. The bread that I shall give is my own body. I shall give it for the life of the world.

OSCAR: “His body he gave up so there'd be justice in the world; that's why he says that it's to give life, and that's why he calls it ‘bread.’”

GERARDO: “They killed that body but it goes on living, giving life to the world, and all who live for others are also part of that body, are bread that

gives life to the world.”

“And the Eucharist?”

I: “Christ chose the image of a community supper to represent the union of people, who should share all goods in common. In the New Testament the same Greek word *koinonia* (which is like saying ‘communism’) designates the Eucharist, the community of wealth, and the union that exists between people and God. When we share the bread of the Eucharist, we share in the body of Christ and we unite with the whole people, with whom he is identified, and with God who is a single thing with him. But the Eucharist is only a figure to mean the real union of people in the whole society.”

LAUREANO: “It seems to me that if we were all well organized in a socialist society, or even better, communist, we'd all be sharing the bread and everything else, as we do in the Eucharist. It wouldn't any longer be the Eucharist that we have at Mass but we would celebrate it every day eating in perfect brotherhood and sharing in all the wealth all alike: it would be a Super Eucharist.”

> *I tell you the truth, if you don't eat the body of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life. He who eats my body and drinks my blood has life eternal; and I shall resurrect him on the last day.*

LAUREANO: “It could be that eating his body and drinking his blood would mean that we could be like him, could share his life, and that we'd sacrifice our lives for the lives of others.”

NATALIA: “ ‘And I shall resurrect him on the last day.’ He's repeating it a lot, but Christ never talked nonsense. He's repeating it so we'll believe it.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that love is eternal and that it never ends and if you live in love then what you do never ends either. Love has to win out over evil, and therefore love has to lead an eternal life, but evil won't be eternal; it's going to end.”

I: “Jesus talks a lot about resurrection, which in the language of the Bible is the same as saying ‘wake up.’ But he doesn't give us the slightest indication of how it's going to be, so it's useless for us to try to imagine it. In another passage from the Gospel according to Saint John, Jesus says the resurrection has already begun.”

He who eats my body and drinks my blood lives in union with me, and I with him. The Father who sent me has life, and I live through him; in the same way, he who feeds on me will live through me.

I: “He is united with God and shares the life of God, and if we are united with him, which means to be united with others, we form part of his body and we share in his life, which is the life of God. And that life is the resurrection, of Christ and of us, of the whole body.”

JULIO RAMON: “He repeats the same thing a lot.” [And with his finger to his temple he gives the signal that Jesus is crazy.]

BONICHE: “He repeats a lot, but each repetition is a little different.”

ALEJANDRO: “And that repetition sounds very poetical.”

NATALIA (emphatically): “And it's so we'll believe it.”

61.

The Adulterous Woman

(John 8:1–11)

> *"Master, this woman has been taken in adultery. The law of Moses orders us to stone this kind of woman. What do you say?" They said this to lay a trap for him and so to have an excuse to accuse him*.

FELIPE: "Those are the same ones that are now opposed to the Gospel, the ones that oppress the people. And now like then they appear as defenders of the law."

WILLIAM: "If he said, 'Let them kill her,' they would ask how someone who preached love could condemn a poor woman to be stoned to death. And if he said, 'Let them not kill her,' he was also screwed because they'd say: 'Aha! This man is contradicting the law of Moses.'"

ALEJANDRO: "But Jesus got out of it very well. They thought he had to answer one thing or the other: he either approved of the law, which was unjust, or he approved of adultery. We too sometimes are asked difficult questions, for example, about violence: it seems we can answer them only one way or the other; but we manage to find a third answer, like Jesus did, which is the wiser answer."

MANUEL: "And here we see the cruelty of these defenders of the law. They didn't care what the woman had done; they were taking her to Jesus for him to condemn her, taking advantage of a woman's weakness to screw Jesus. It's the same now in our system; they'll use anything to attack people who want justice."

Then Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger.

“Maybe it was to show them he didn't think they were important.”

“Would he be drawing a little landscape?”

“He could have been writing a message, something about love. But they didn't even read that; they were just interested in plaguing him.”

But as they went on questioning him, he stood up and said to them: “The one of you who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.” And he bent down again and went on writing on the ground.

OLIVIA: “Jesus observed that, although the woman was an adulteress, there were others who had committed much greater sins, and they were the ones who were oppressing the people, and nobody was killing them. There's a lot of harsh criticism nowadays of the actions of a woman like that, and they don't even see or denounce all the oppression and all the injustice there is. That's why, when they bring Jesus one of those women, who was probably a single woman, not one of the great ladies, his response is very clever.”

WILLIAM: “We have to take into account too that Jesus was in favor of equality of men and women; this is very important now, when there's so much talk of women's liberation. Later Saint Paul would say that with Christ there are no longer Jews and Greeks, masters and slaves, men and women. And Christ could have been writing down the adulteries of those who were accusing that woman. Because if that was the punishment for that woman, why shouldn't they stone to death the men who do the same?”

TERESITA: “I believe all the men who were accusing that woman were adulterers.”

OSCAR: “It seems there were great oppressions at that time, right? And one of them was that a woman was treated like dirt, because if she, the female, did it, it was terrible; if the man did it they didn't even notice.”

OLIVIA: “It was the *machismo* of that time, which was very strong, but we go right on having it in our time. That woman didn't commit adultery all by herself, and the man she committed adultery with, they didn't accuse him.”

OSCAR: “Yes, they didn't bring him.”

I: “In the Gospels called the Apocrypha, which are fictitious but which may have some authentic details preserved by tradition, there is a mysterious saying of Jesus, which in the light of what you have said becomes very clear, and it sounds as if he had really said it (nobody else would dare to invent it): Jesus’ phrase is that in the kingdom of heaven ‘men will be like women, and women like men.’”

ROGER PEREZ, the young painter from Managua: “The case of this woman is important for us in Latin America. We need to learn this lesson of tolerance and pardon and love in the case of the adultery of the woman. We've had a tradition opposed to this for centuries, the *machismo* tradition. Among us the adulterous woman is still condemned to death, and not just in songs. There are phrases that we all repeat: ‘If she did anything like that to me, I'd kill her, that bitch.’ This isn't Christian, it isn't revolutionary.”

WILLIAM: “Adultery is a minor sin, man, compared with others. If a woman goes with a man, well, it's a sin. I don't say it isn't, especially if harm is done to the man or woman comrade or the children are going to suffer or there are other consequences. But compared with the harm that comes from other sins, it's not one of the most serious ones.”

I: “It's more serious to stone the woman to death, right?”

On hearing this, they went away one by one, beginning with the oldest.

OLIVIA: “Because the oldest were the most sinful, the most adulterous maybe. Or robbers, exploiters.”

WILLIAM: “And they were the ones too with the most prestige, the most venerable, and the bosses. At that time society was run by the oldest, never by a young man. And those were the worst ones too, corrupted by power.”

“The oldest ones are always the most evil.”

ROGER PEREZ: “Like certain very corrupt, very perverse, very criminal old men that we have in the government: Lorenzo Guerrero, Luis Manuel Debayle.”

OSCAR: “From what Christ said it's clear that those bastards were evil old men.”

I: “And let's not forget that they were religious people: the Bible stresses at the beginning that they were ‘teachers of the law and Pharisees.’ They

have come talking to him about Moses. But Jesus accuses those religious people and puts himself on the side of an adulteress.”

OSCAR: “What a relief at that moment for that woman, right? Because even though the public had known all about her, there they saw that the others were doing the same things, although they were doing them secretly. She was surprised, it seems to me, that her sins were minor and that the others came out worse than she did; they were no better, and now they had no heart to attack her.”

WILLIAM: “They come with this woman to Jesus invoking the law of Moses; the law has always been used to oppress the people. And Jesus’ answer invalidates not only this particular law that they're asking him about, but the whole judicial system.”

OSCAR: “Man, this Moses made that law tough! To stone a woman who had committed a fault! To throw hundreds of rocks at her that could kill her! It would have been more humane to kill her with a *machete* blow, or with a pistol. Others committed other worse things and it wasn't known except among themselves. If they treated the faults of everybody with this same severity, they'd all have put an end to each other.”

I: “That law that they were invoking was an ancient law, from the time when society was very barbaric.”

OSCAR: “Yes, but who made the mistake of making that law?”

WILLIAM: “It was no error, man; those laws were less savage than others they'd had before.”

MANUEL: “But weren't those laws inspired in Moses by God?”

WILLIAM: “But Jesus makes it clear that what was progress earlier can later be a step backward. They face Jesus with tradition, and Jesus shows them that to maintain tradition is equal to maintaining injustice.”

I: “The law of the universe is the law of evolution, that's the supreme law of God. Any other law that tries to hold onto the past is an unjust law. Father Juan Luis Segundo says that in the language of the New Testament ‘sin’ is equal to conservatism: it's the attitude opposed to change.”

JULIO: “Jesus is talking there just about the case of one woman, but I think we ought now to relate it to everything. Not just to women but to everybody, men and women, to everybody that's being killed, if not with stones or machetes or pistols, then with hunger and all the other tortures of exploitation. That case of the women who were being persecuted by the law is the same as all poor people who've been crushed by the rich.”

GLORIA: “And women? They're more oppressed because they're women. That's why, to make us see that the law is unjust and oppressive, Jesus gave the example of that woman who, according to the law, was to be stoned.”

> *“Woman, where are those who were accusing you? Did none condemn you?” She said: “No, Lord, none.” Then Jesus said to her: “Nor will I condemn you; go and sin no more.”*

MANUEL: “And I bet she didn't sin again. She was freed from the law and also from the sin.”

ELVIS: “We were dealing with that same thing yesterday in the meeting of the youth group, what to do when a comrade is at fault, and we said we ought to give him advice, persuade him to reform himself.”

MYRIAM: “Jesus teaches us how to change our lives. If we've sinned, not to go on sinning.”

ALEJANDRO, her brother: “I don't believe he said only one sentence. It's possible he said many things to her, he was with her quite a while, and he left her all straightened out.”

MYRIAM (who said earlier that Jesus maybe wrote some message): “And she *would* read what he wrote on the ground.”

62.

“The Truth Will Make You Free”

(John 8:31–47)

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him: “If you stick by what I tell you, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

“He's talking all confused. Maybe the things he's saying are too high up to be able to understand them. That's why they told him he was possessed, that is, neurotic,” said young JULIO GUEVARA.

MYRIAM, his sister: “But if he said those things, it was so we could understand them.”

ALEJANDRO: “He says the truth will make us free, because the oppressors have concealed reality from us. The truth that Christ talks about is to uncover the injustice there is in society, to show that there are social classes. Our eyes are opened and we see these things. With lies we're deceived; we believe it's proper to have rich and poor. When we understand reality, we liberate ourselves.”

LAUREANO: “I believe the truth makes us free because the truth is equality. If we're all equal, we're free; if there's nobody who's bigger than the others, then we're free. Deceit is what enslaves us. They oppress with deceit, and we free ourselves with truth, unmasking the deceit.”

FELIPE: “Truth teaches us that we're all equal, as Laureano says, and that all of us human beings must live a single reality, the reality that we're brothers and sisters. Not to look on anybody as master or slave, that seems to me the truth. The truth makes us brothers and sisters and therefore it frees us.”

GLORIA: “I think it's clear. That's why they keep the poor in ignorance, because without ignorance you can't have exploitation.”

I: “According to Jesus, it's not enough to believe in him, for the Gospel says he told those who ‘had believed in him’ that they would be his disciples only if they practiced what he said. It's only that praxis that gives us the truth, and therefore freedom. You can believe in Christ as the bourgeois Christians do, and that's not being a disciple, and that's not being free.”

> *They answered him: “We are children of Abraham and we have never been slaves of anyone. How do you say that we shall get to be free?” Jesus said to them: “I tell you the truth, all those who sin are slaves of sin.”*

I: “They claim they're free because they are Israelites. According to the law the Israelites could not be made slaves for life and were to be treated as wage earners, since the whole people had been freed by God from Egyptian slavery. But that was a law that was merely on paper.”

FELIPE: “Maybe those Jews had a freedom like the freedom they say we have, but the freedom around here is freedom to abuse us, freedom to exploit us all they can. It's freedom to sin, that is, to commit injustice, and that's not freedom, it's oppression.”

OSCAR: “You think you're free because you're free to go anywhere you want with an empty belly. It used to be that slaves worked just for food, now it's the same; if you work you use up your energy for a few pennies. Oppression has really got you shafted.”

WILLIAM: “But where there's masters and slaves nobody's free. That's why Jesus tells the makers of oppression that they are slaves of their sin, oppression.”

I: “Yahweh in the Bible appears as the God of Freedom, the God that brought Israel out of Egypt; and he's a God that doesn't force anyone even to worship him since he doesn't want images; he only forces you to be free, and he doesn't tolerate any image that makes people subjects. That's the freedom that Christ says his truth will give us. And that's the only commandment that he brings, what the Apostle Saint James calls: ‘the law of freedom.’”

A slave is not always part of the family, but a son is always part of the family. If the Son gives you freedom, you will be truly free.

MANUEL: “If we agree to a system of deceit and exploitation, we're slaves. If we struggle for the establishment of justice on earth, we're children of God, and we're brothers and sisters of the others. We all make up a single family, with God and the others.”

LAUREANO: “I believe Jesus Christ is saying that as long as some people are more powerful than others, there have to be slaves. And we're no longer brothers and sisters but masters and slaves.”

I: “He's telling them that they'll be driven out of the house if they stay in the slave category, because slaves don't belong to the family. But he adds that the Son has authority equal to the authority of the Father, to give freedom to the slaves of the house, if the slaves agree to be free. It seems to be about a house where they're trying to emancipate the slaves.”

BOSCO: “And he's telling them they can be part of a community with the Father, the family of the Trinity, but not until we're free.”

They said to him: “We are not bastard children; we have only one Father, who is God.”

I: “They tell Jesus that they're not sons of whores. The prophets have talked a lot about the prostitutions of Israel: She was the wife of God but she was an adulterous wife. And they understand also that Jesus is telling them that their father is the devil.”

OSCAR: “Their father must be the one that never tells the truth and keeps the people deceived and controls them by means of dictators. So the people are at ease, not knowing that they are his slaves, and so they don't worry.”

Jesus said to them: “If God were your Father, you would love me, because I came from God, and I come on his behalf. I have not come on my own account; it was God who sent me. Why can't you understand what I say to you? Because you do not want to listen to my message.”

I: “He doesn't come by himself; he has been sent by the community of God, as Bosco says, by the communism of God, so that all people can form

part of that communism. That is his message. And it's curious that he says they *can't* understand him because they *don't want to* hear him."

OSCAR: "The ones that can't understand, it seems to me, are the ones that don't want to be even with everyone but to be on top of the rest, so they don't want to hear: Screwing all the rest is what they want to be doing."

MANUEL: "He knows they're going to kill him; he feels himself among enemies. And it's because he brings liberation and they want to preserve injustice. It seems to me that's what it means when it says he died for our sins."

FELIPE: "Those jerks that thought they were saved because they were of the people of Abraham are like the exploiters of today who think they are saved because they belong to some religion."

> *Your father is the devil; you belong to him, and you want to do what he wants. The devil has been a murderer from the beginning.*

FELIPE: "I think it's a good thing to make it clear that the devil here isn't that ghost that people imagine and that suddenly comes out to scare you. The devil is a reality: he's selfishness; he's the evil ideas you have about other people."

BOSCO: "But the devil is also a ghost, because the evil we now see going on in the politics of Nicaragua and other countries is a false reality: it's a ghost."

I: "The Apostle Saint James says something like what Felipe says: when somebody is tempted, the one that tempts him is his own selfishness. In the Bible 'Satan' means simply 'adversary.' Christ says this adversary is responsible for all the crimes and injustices of humanity, from the first murder (of Abel): because he's been a murderer from the beginning."

OLIVIA: "The murders of so many undernourished children or sick people that die for lack of medical attention, or those others that get murdered, all that's the action of the devil. There's still a lot of the devil in Nicaragua. It's the same kind of people that wanted to murder Jesus, and that he fought against."

DONALD: "Well, that devil can have a secret agent in any country, doing the work that he wants, carrying out all his orders. That's when there's a dictator, and all the people live doing what just one guy wants, the guy that's in charge."

I: “The devil, the adversary, is the force opposed to evolution. He is equal to oppression. According to Christ exploitation is murder.”

> *He has never been based on truth, and he never tells the truth. When he tells lies he speaks of what comes out from inside him; because he is a liar and is the father of lying*.

BOSCO: “This applies exactly to the United States, just as if he'd seen it: its terrible crimes accompanied by lies, the propaganda of its radios.”

“And this applies to Nicaragua just as if he'd lived at this time. Hasn't this regime been a murderer from the beginning, when the father of lying began it with the murder of Sandino the liberator?”

ALEJO: “Crime always goes with lying, because if it wasn't for propaganda, you wouldn't have injustice.”

ELVIS: “Promising the people all kinds of things and not giving them anything and exploiting them more, that's the work of the devil too, the father of lying.”

OSCAR: “They force the poor man to vote and the next day they forget about him and afterwards for any reason at all, bang, he's in jail. They don't care about anything! We mustn't let them fool us. And we've got to talk to the others, clear up their minds that they've got fooled. I can't explain myself, that's the truth, but you understand what I mean.”

I: “Jesus identifies the devil, the adversary, with lying, because he's the adversary of truth. Lying and oppression are the same thing, just as truth and liberty are the same.”

> *When I speak the truth you do not believe me. Who among you can accuse me of a sin? And if I speak the truth, why do you not believe me?*

OLIVIA: “Evil has had more power than good, even though good is going to triumph in the end. At present, evil is bigger than good. And they didn't believe Jesus because he was speaking the truth, and all they believe is lies. If he'd spoken their lie, they sure would have believed him. The same thing is happening now.”

“Why should they believe, if a guy that tells the truth gets his mouth shut up with a bullet, and that's that! That's the way it happens in Nicaragua, and that time the Sandinistas had to seize a radio station in Managua to tell the

truth, and the government got so mad that they screwed the owner of the station for no reason. That's the way it happened in Christ's time, and because he told the truth he died."

WILLIAM: "Truth and justice are the same, as we've seen. Jesus says he speaks the truth because in him there's no injustice (no one can accuse him of a sin). His message is only about justice. Truth is reality and lying is false ideas with which people disfigure reality, and those ideas are produced by exploitation."

ELVIS: "He asks why they won't believe him when he tells them the truth but immediately afterwards, he tells why it is."

> *He who is from God listens to the words of God; but as you are not from God, therefore you won't listen*.

FELIPE: "The ones that are from God are the needy, the poor. The ones that the Father gave to Christ are the poor, right? Those of us that need everything and need everybody and want unity, *we* are the children of God."

WILLIAM: "The children of God are the ones that are on the side of justice, and they're the ones that listen to the message. The others 'won't listen,' because what they want is lying and crime."

IVAN: "Does that mean that not all people are children of God?"

LAUREANO: "The exploiters aren't children of God."

63.

The Good Samaritan

(Luke 10:25–37)

A teacher of the law stood up and said to him, to lay a trap for him: "Master, what must I do to win eternal life?"

I said it had always interested me that the Gospel should say that that question was to lay a trap for him.

MANUELITO: "They believed in a heap of religious rules, and they wanted to see if Jesus said they had to follow them; if he said they didn't, he set himself against the law."

ALEJANDRO: "It seems to me that what was happening then with the law is happening now with the Gospel: The law was extremely clear, but they didn't understand it, and according to them, they were following it. And they hope that Jesus will speak against the law, as they understand it, so they can condemn him."

I: "I see. It's as if a supporter of this regime should ask us what we think of the Gospels. That could be a dangerous question, couldn't it?"

ALEJANDRO: "It's all alike, it's the very same thing. Besides, they ask the question, they're always asking it."

LAUREANO: "He could have said: 'Take from the rich what they have and distribute it among the poor,' but that would have been dangerous."

Jesus answered him: "What is it that is written in the law? How do you read it?" The teacher of the law answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as you love yourself."

LAUREANO: “In trying to catch Jesus in a trap, he was the one who fell into the trap. Jesus makes him say things he doesn't do.”

Another: “Maybe he wanted to argue with him about worship in the temple, the Sabbath, unclean food, purification, and many other laws that were nonsense, and Jesus makes him say what's important: loving God and your neighbor.”

But he, trying to defend himself, said to Jesus: “And who is my neighbor?”

I said that “neighbor,” the nearby person, was applied in the Bible to all who were from Israel. Why would he ask who is his neighbor “trying to defend himself”?

ALEJANDRO: “Maybe because he realizes that he had never loved his neighbor. He could pray to God all he wanted and tell him that he loved him; but neighbor, shit, up to then he didn't even know who he was.”

OLIVIA: “He didn't know his neighbor because he didn't have love. He did like they do nowadays: give a little alms, a bit of bread to a few poor children.”

REBECA: “Maybe he loved his children, his close friends, but that was a selfish love; you can't call that love, because if you love just a tiny few, when there's all that enormous crowd of people, you're not loving anything.”

FELIPE: “He knew very well who his neighbor was, but he didn't want Jesus to realize that he had asked the question to catch him in a trap.”

OLIVIA: “Your neighbors are all of humanity, that's what that fellow didn't know, that his neighbors were everybody.”

ALEJANDRO: “He thought they were the people who lived across the street, who surely were well-to-do like him.”

We read the parable. A man was assaulted by thieves and left wounded on the road. A priest and a Levite passed by. A Samaritan took care of him and took him to an inn.

“Well, then, which of those three does it seem to you was the neighbor of the man assaulted by the thieves?” The teacher of the law said: “The one who took pity on him.” Then Jesus said to him: “Go you and do the same.”

OLIVIA: “He gave him as an example a person of another race and another religion so we can know that everybody is a neighbor. He gave as an example one who wasn't a neighbor but just the opposite, an enemy.”

FELIPE: “The man's question was what did you have to do to win eternal life, true life, and Jesus’ answer is: love. Love is life.”

An old man from San Miguelito: “But the law talks about love of God and love of neighbors, not just love of neighbors.”

FELIPE: “But love of neighbors is the same as the other love, and that's the only example he gives.”

MANUEL: “It seems to me, according to this example of the religious and the heretic, that love of neighbors is more important, because some take care of the temple but not of neighbors, and so they are evil, and the other one didn't take care of the temple; he was a heretic, and he was the good one.”

I: “It seems to me that you could say it this way: those who love God without loving their neighbor are not carrying out the law, but they are carrying out the law if they love their neighbor without loving God. Jesus tells the teacher of the law to do as the Samaritan does.”

Another: “Those people in the temple really didn't love God because they didn't love their neighbor, and as we see, the law of the two loves is a single law. Those were only religious people; they devoted themselves only to their prayers. So perhaps maybe that's why they didn't stop on the road, because they were in a hurry to get to their temple duties. It was religion itself that prevented them from loving their neighbor, and that kind of thing is still going on.”

I: “But we're accustomed to thinking that this parable is to make us see that the Samaritan is the one who loved his neighbor, and what Jesus asks at the end of the parable is which of the three who passed by on the road *was the neighbor* of the wounded man.”

One answered: “The man without religion was the neighbor.”

“It wasn't the wounded man?”

“It wasn't the wounded man.”

MANUEL: “It's confused, because he said: ‘Love your neighbor,’ and here it appears it's somebody else.”

FELIPE: “It seems that instead it's the one who serves that's the neighbor.”

LAUREANO: “O.K., but notice that if somebody serves me and I serve him, we're neighbors.”

I said there's been so much talk of neighborly love that we no longer know clearly what the phrase means. Among us there's a more up-to-date word for “neighbor” that means the same thing. It's “comrade.” The law spoke of loving your comrade as you loved yourself, and the scribe asks who the comrade is. And at the end of the parable, when Jesus asked who was the comrade of the wounded man, he had to admit that it was “the one who took pity on him.”

“It's clearer that way, saying comrade instead of neighbor.”

And I said the truth was that the two are comrades, the Samaritan and the wounded man, for comrades have to be two. The term “neighbor” we must then understand as a mutual relation: he is neighbor to me and I am neighbor to him.

“Yes, because being charitable to the poor, giving them worn-out clothes, isn't loving your neighbor. Love of your neighbor is comradeship. Because that man not only cared for the wounded man but he took him to a hotel and paid for his room and said he'd pay for anything extra when he came back and, of course, from then on they remained friends; they were already comrades.”

LAUREANO: “The people are the wounded man who's bleeding to death on the highway. The religious people who are not impressed by the people's problems are those two that were going to the temple to pray. The atheists who are revolutionaries are the good Samaritan of the parable, the good companion, the good comrade.”

“The lesson is that everybody must be our neighbor, our companion, and that there should be no barriers between us.”

“We're all neighbors.”

“But Jesus doesn't say that. Jesus asks: ‘Of the three, which one was the neighbor of the wounded man?’ Does he mean that the others weren't, the priest and the Levite?”

“They weren't.”

“Because those guys didn't love.”

And the man from San Miguelito insisted: “Neighbors are the whole human race.”

MANUEL: “Where there's mutual aid, that's where there's neighbors. Only where there's comradeship, where there's companions and comrades, there's neighbors.”

“Jesus makes it clear that some, because they're selfish, stop being neighbors of the others.”

I: “There's something else that's strange in this Gospel. The scribe has said what the commandment is: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart,’ and so forth, ‘and love your neighbor as you love yourself,’ and Jesus has told him that he has answered well. But then Jesus gives only the example of love of your neighbor, a pagan who comes to the aid of the wounded man, and he says to the scribe: ‘Go and do the same.’ We might wonder: and the commandment about the love of God, what about that? Because to illustrate the double commandment Jesus might have given the example of a priest who is going to the temple to fulfill all his duties in the worship of God, and on the way he helps the wounded man. If anybody now should give, as an example of the love ‘of God and neighbor’ an atheistic Marxist, a Che Guevara, who loved only his neighbor, wouldn't we find this incongruous?”

ALEJANDRO: “And the Christian, the one who goes to the temple, is left looking silly! Do you suppose Jesus accepted the first commandment, because it was written in the law, so as not to get involved in problems, but he wanted to show that the important thing was the other thing?”

ELVIS: “The fact is that in your neighbor there's God. It's not that love of God gets left out, it's that those who love their neighbor are right there loving God.”

ALEJANDRO: “It's too bad that boob didn't go on asking, because now they lay the same trap for us, and they tell us that stuff about the Samaritan is all very well, but that what's most important is the spiritual part, religion, the love of God. And if he'd asked more questions, this would have come out clearer.”

LAUREANO: “The other poor bastards are loving something that doesn't exist.”

I said that Jesus really was clear enough, but his words have been interpreted in a way that makes them unclear. He teaches somewhere else that the most important commandment is to do unto others as we want them to do unto us. The Apostle Saint James will say later that to love your neighbor as you love yourself is “the supreme commandment,” and Saint Paul will say that the whole law consists of love of your neighbor. It's true that the law said, as the scribe has said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your

mind,” but in the Bible it says that this is because Yahweh is the one who freed the Jews from Egypt and he is the only one who does justice to the poor and the oppressed. It's like saying that you don't need to have any God except human love and justice. That's why Jesus somewhere else says that the second commandment is “like the first,” and in this parable he shows that the two are fulfilled by fulfilling the second. And that's why too, when the rich young man asks him what he should do to be saved, Jesus quotes to him the commandments about neighborly love, without mentioning the one about love of God.

LAUREANO: “In other words, he's saying that there is no God, then, that God is your neighbor.”

I: “He's saying that God is love.”

LAUREANO: “He's saying that to love others, that's God.”

I: “He's saying that there *is* a God but God is that.”

LAUREANO: “God's all of us, then.”

I: “Love. All, but united; not all separated, hating each other or exploiting each other. It's really not all of us, because those two who passed by there, they weren't neighbors of the other one. If we have a meeting here in which there are exploiters and murderers, you're not going to say: ‘God is all of us.’”

LAUREANO: “God is all of us who love each other. And all of us who don't love each other and are screwing the people, that's the devil.”

I: “Saint Augustine says God is the love with which we love each other.”

ALEJANDRO: “What has been said here is very important!”

OLIVIA: “As I see it, we mustn't try to love God, because God doesn't exist, as Laureano says; God's in heaven and is not asking us for anything for himself here on earth. Some say they love him, but forget it; they love him because they don't see him. There are people who prefer to love the God of heaven, because they're not seeing him. It's hard to be a Christian, like that Samaritan was. It's easier to be just religious, like so many Catholics are, and be praying to God in the temple.”

I: “When they judged Jesus the main accusation against him was that he was against the temple. A Samaritan woman, another heretic, asked him if the temple of Jerusalem was the true one, and he answered her that now God wasn't going to be adored in temples but everywhere ‘in spirit and in truth.’ Since then we Christians have filled the earth with temples, but Jesus

taught us that the only temple is the human being. The man fallen by the wayside in Jerusalem, he was the temple."

Another: "The government likes to have sermons just about the love of God, about the salvation of the soul, and about heaven. I believe they even pay for those radio sermons. That gringo preacher, Spencer, who preaches every day sweetly about the spiritual salvation of Christ, he's probably a CIA agent."

A South American hippie: "But our enemies are also part of God, because they're also human beings. If they do evil it's maybe because they're mistaken, and we must love them."

I said we must love them and fight them to free them from the injustice they are committing. God is not in the one who is being selfish; it's the devil who's in him, as Laureano says. God is only in the one who loves. God is probably in the exploiters when they aren't exploiting any more and are united with us. There are some people in the parable we haven't spoken about: the assailants. These are the exploiters, who have legally assaulted the people, with the laws that they themselves have made, and they have left the people naked and covered with wounds, bleeding to death at the wayside of history.

LAUREANO: "And while religion went along that road without looking at the wounded man, communism, which didn't believe in God, has been the good companion that took up the wounded man and took him to a shelter where he could have food and a roof and clothing and medicine, all free."

64.

Martha and Mary

(Luke 10:38–42)

At the hut. We have had rice, black beans, fish, and avocados. Teresita and Doña Justa cooked. Juan, who is four, is playing, kicking a big ball around among us, while we talk.

Jesus came to a little town and stayed at the home of Martha and Mary. Martha was very busy with her household tasks and Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to him. And Martha said to Jesus:

> *"Lord, doesn't it matter to you at all that my sister leaves me alone with all the work? Tell her to help me." But Jesus answered: "Martha, Martha, you are concerned and afflicted by many things, but only one is necessary."*

"It seems that Martha didn't understand what concerned Mary."

"Martha was certainly concerned about cooking a chicken for lunch, and Mary wasn't helping."

OLIVIA: "Well, Mary didn't give food much importance. She thought teaching was more important than cooking. After listening to that teaching, they had time enough to get that chicken ready. The same thing can apply to us. On many Sundays we aren't interested in coming here because we have things to do and we're cooking our dinner. That means we're not interested in the community, what's most important."

TOMAS: "Martha was getting ready to cook, but Mary knew that he was the word of God, which is food. Am I right? There are some who don't come here because they have to take care of the pigs, to look at the

cornfields, to fish. All that's all right, but what's more important is the word of God: That's necessary. Martha was doing that for love of him, but Mary was doing something better, which was to hear his word, which was love. And hearing his word, they could learn to love the others, to serve them."

OSCAR: "Then he wasn't hungry; he just wanted to talk, and he wouldn't have minded sleeping on the floor. Martha was worrying about trifles, with Jesus right there, instead of profiting from his words!"

CESAR: "It wasn't right to be cooking that meal to celebrate his coming and to entertain him, and to lose his teachings because she was cooking. The best part there could be was to listen to him. But Christ doesn't want people to forget about food and necessities on account of his teachings."

ALEJANDRO: "He'd said we should seek justice and everything else would come with it. It's important to concern ourselves about other people's food, everybody's food, and that's just what justice is. But that's not the same thing as being concerned about going to cook a lunch, because that's not important. What she was really doing was only entertaining him, and meanwhile maybe Mary was talking about very interesting subjects with him, talking maybe about food for all the people, and other problems about people's lives that were going to get solved, medicine, talking about how to change the world. And Martha, concerned only about that meal, was being very silly up to a certain point."

"I think what Jesus wanted to say to this Martha was that it's more important to be at the meeting, talking back and forth, about the problems of economic or spiritual life or whatever, and not be preparing meals. Lots of people on Sunday stay away from coming here to do their chores, picking up four sticks of wood maybe, and not giving any heed to the community meetings."

OSCAR: "It seems Martha was pretty selfish. She was more concerned about those chores, but she wanted Mary to be with her too, and not to be doing something better, listening about these things that are very important for us. And if I stay home, how am I going to know what we're saying here?"

"Lots of us are interested in what we're going to eat on Monday. Getting ready what we're going to eat tomorrow. Or even this evening."

"Concerning yourself with Christ is also concerning yourself with dinner. The fact is that since she's concerned only about those in her own household, her attitude is selfish."

“Martha was concerned only about Christ.”

“About Christ, without thinking about all the Christs of today,” added OLIVIA. “It's like I'm here waiting on Ernesto, cooking, concentrating on him, ignoring the rest, the community.”

MARIA: “One was concerned only about the little group, and the other about everyone, about the kingdom, about all of humanity.”

OSCAR: “What was happening to Martha, I figure, is that she was selfish. She would have worked and would have been content, and I think that then she would have taken part in some of what Jesus was saying too, what he was saying to Mary, then and there, the whole group. She was envious. Martha should have done her cooking and let the sister tell her everything afterwards. But she didn't want Mary to be there. Let her be working with her! You see? And then that's where she kind of shit on her.”

“It's like Olivia, for example, who has a lot of kids, and it's up to her to come and cook on Sundays. And she'd like to have everybody there with her, and maybe we're solving our problems here, and she didn't care, she didn't want the girls to take part. That's being selfish. A woman that's only interested in food, that's the way Martha was, then.”

OLIVIA: “I think she said it out of simplicity. She was generous. Look, you ought to see what it's like to be stuck in a kitchen. I think he gave that lesson to make us see that food shouldn't prevent us from being interested in the kingdom. Because meals come at any hour. We've got supper ready right now.”

OSCAR: “Then you're like Martha.”

“I say that the two of them were acting all right, but one was doing more important work than the other. Martha was working on material food, and Mary was doing a spiritual work.”

I: “Jesus doesn't exactly make a distinction between material and spiritual work. He just says that Martha is concerned about ‘many things’ and that ‘only one is necessary.’”

OSCAR: “Man, I think it's unity.”

ALEJANDRO: “It's quite clear they were talking about solving problems on the social level, and Martha was trying to solve practical problems. How were they going to cook the chicken for that day's lunch and the others were talking about solving the problems of the world.”

“It seems to me that what's necessary is unity, equality among everybody; the problem of the relations among people, that's what it was

important to talk about. Martha was concerned about problems that are many but not important.”

I: “We might say, then, that what Jesus is saying here is that the only important thing is love.”

OSCAR: “From love comes unity, right?”

OLIVIA: “And having unity, we all eat. Where there's love there's food for everybody, but where there's no love there's food only for some families, not for all. The only important thing, then, was that thing she was talking over with Jesus.”

Mary has chosen the better part, and no one is going to take it away from her.

“Nobody can take away love.”

“Love is what's important, not food and the other things.”

“You really have to distinguish between food for a private house, which is what Martha was preparing, and food for everybody. The only thing necessary is love between everybody.”

OSCAR: “But look, Ernesto, the way I understand it is that you can find food anywhere but you can't find love very easily; and that thing, love, is what Mary was looking for; she wanted to have love and she wasn't interested in food. She'd forgotten to think about lunch, and not until Martha came to scold her did she remember and she got flustered, but Jesus said: There's no need to get flustered; she's devoted to more important work. Food, I can eat any old thing. But what's important for me is that there's a bit of love in my heart. And I have to find out how to acquire it, and I have to look for unity.”

“Mary chose the best part. And so was Martha's the worst part?”

“It would be an average one.”

“It seems Martha wanted to take that part from Mary, and Jesus tells her that nobody's going to take it away from her.”

“And that part nobody's going to take away from her; instead she's going to share it with everybody.”

“Mary, even though she wasn't helping her sister and wasn't being nice to her, there at Jesus’ feet she was united with all of us.”

TOMAS: “And Mary chose the best part because from having been listening to his word she was going to follow him and afterward she was

going to be with him always.”

OSCAR: “That's pretty clear.”

I: “Traditionally in these two figures contemplation and action have been represented. But you have found a somewhat different interpretation, and it seems to me better suited to the text.”

WILLIAM: “Couldn't we sum it up this way: one was a revolutionary and the other wasn't?”

65.

Riches

(Luke 12:13–21)

One among the people said to Jesus: “Master, tell my brother to give me my part of the inheritance.” But Jesus said to him: “Man, who put me between you like a judge or a divider?”

I: “Didn't Jesus do badly by not wanting to do justice between those two?”

FELIPE: “He was coming to teach us love. If people carried out his teaching, the brother wouldn't steal the inheritance of the brother.”

WILLIAM: “He didn't come to distribute the riches; it's up to society to do that. And the sharing ought to be done among everybody, not just between two. In that sharing they asked Jesus to do, the rest were left out. They ask him to sanction private property, the inheritance laws, the status quo. He refuses, he hasn't come for that. On the contrary, he's come to destroy that social order.”

One of the Guevara girls: “I ask you: would it be right for that man to get that money?”

LAUREANO: “First you have to find out if that inheritance was large or small. If it was small and he was poor, it certainly would be right. If it was a lot of money, no.”

ALEJANDRO: “It was probably a lot, because it seems he comes to Jesus seeking the intervention of an important person for a very important question. And Jesus right there talks about riches, about rich people, so it seems it's a matter of a big capital.”

OSCAR: “Well, if that's so, it wasn't right, because it was asking Jesus to be a capitalist, to be an exploiter, to have too much; and that doesn't do any good to anybody, to have too many things. That way Jesus would have done him harm.”

TOMAS: “It's clear that Jesus did right in not wanting to divide up that wealth. If he'd told Jesus he was going to divide it among everybody, maybe Jesus would have gone along, but there it was just going to be among two rich people.”

LAUREANO: “He didn't come to divide up wealth, to create capital. Many rich people think religion is for that, to defend their private property, their inheritances. It seems to me that in a Christian society, that's to say, in a socialist or communist society, there shouldn't be any inheritance.”

OSCAR: “That man was asking for money, which was going to isolate him from the other brothers and sisters. In fighting for *his* inheritance, only thinking about himself, he was getting separated from other people. That money was going to make him poor, because true wealth isn't money, it's love. That man didn't know that riches are other people.”

And I said that this reminded me of a phrase of Marx: The greatest wealth is the other person, and that it's poverty that makes one feel that need for the greater wealth.

“These words of Jesus give the impression that he answered in anger. He was probably sore. How could they think he was coming to solve questions of money, to have somebody get a half million pesos!”

“He wants nothing to do with the rich, not even to do justice among them, because he knows that among them everything is injustices, and he rejects their system totally.”

“He hasn't come to earth to divide inheritance, because who said that inheritors have a right to receive their inheritance?”

“The man saw that Jesus was just and that's why he wants to set him up as a judge. But he didn't know that Jesus’ justice was another kind of justice, revolutionary justice. Even now there are Christians who think that Christ's justice is the justice of capitalism. The Chilean military junta says it's restoring Christianity, because it's restoring private property.”

FELIPE: “Jesus was coming to divide all the wealth of the world among all the people.”

A Protestant from the opposite shore: “It seems to me he wasn't coming to share material things but spiritual things, and this man wanted him to

share material things.”

OLIVIA: “Well, it seems to me he comes to share material things too, but not just to two people. Because notice that just with spiritual things, forgetting material things, you can't live. And the spiritual and the material can't be separated; it has to be one single united thing, but not shared just between two people. Because notice that if the only thing shared is spiritual, then the people starve to death.”

FELIPE: “If you want to achieve a spiritual life, you have to achieve it through material things. Because if I love God (‘I'm on the side of God!’), to prove it I have to do something for my comrades and share what I have, be brothers and sisters with everyone. If I don't achieve it in material things, I'm not loving; it's more like I'm hating.”

Notice and beware of all greed; for people's lives do not depend on the many things they may have.

OLIVIA: “Happiness doesn't depend on riches. There are many rich people that are unhappy.”

MARIITA: “It's the riches that make them unhappy. They have worries we don't have.”

I: “According to Jesus, it's not just happiness; it's life itself that doesn't depend on the things one may have.”

TOMAS: “A selfish person is dead in the midst of life.”

MARCELINO: “Life depends on food, clothing, also housing, medicine. But he says not ‘on the many things they may have’: that's to be rich.”

FELIPE: “The many things (having too much), that's what kills life.”

REBECA, Marcelino's wife: “The fact that some people have too much of a lot of things, that makes for law suits, wars, that also kill life.”

WILLIAM: “He's also saying that life doesn't depend on *having;* it depends on *being.”*

TERESITA: “So that's why he didn't want to give that man the riches he was fighting for, they aren't any good.”

LAUREANO: “As I understand it, he says that having riches isn't living, it's being isolated, it's death.”

OLIVIA: “He shows that riches are the same as greed. Because he talks about riches and before he said ‘beware of greed.’ Because the richer you

are the greedier you have to be. And then it's death, not happiness; so riches are a curse."

ALEJANDRO: "Riches that are shared unevenly."

DONALD: "Here he was showing the one who was asking him this that he shouldn't be selfish. Because he *was* being selfish. He wouldn't let the brother alone who had the things. And then, instead of abandoning that system, he wanted to be another greedy man, or he'd become one. They'd be two greedy men fighting over an inheritance."

> *Then he gave them this example: There was a rich man, and his lands gave a great harvest. And he thought: "I know what I'm going to do: I'm going to tear down my barns and build other bigger ones, and in them I'll keep all my harvests and all my goods and I'll say to myself: 'My friend, you have many things stored up for many years; rest, eat, drink, and be merry.'" But God said to him: "Fool, this very night you will die, and all you have stored up, who will get it?" That's what happens to the man that piles up riches for himself, but who is poor in the eyes of God*.

FELIX: "That rich man, when he dies he's not saved, because he was poor in love; he wasn't rich in God's view. And others enjoy the riches."

I: "Jesus gives the example of a rich man who died when he had the most riches and other people enjoyed his riches. And then he says *that's* what happens to all those who pile up for themselves. But that was an example."

OLIVIA: "The rich man is dead now, because he's selfish, and he's not enjoying his riches."

FELIPE: "The guy that has riches doesn't have love, so he's poor in the eyes of God, because God is love among brothers and sisters."

TOMAS: "That rich guy was selfish because all he thought about was making his barns bigger to store up more just for himself. That's what all the rich always do."

LAUREANO: "No doubt about it; those who store up riches when there's so many people to share with are already damned; they're damned for storing things up."

ALEJANDRO: "What the man in the parable did is what rich people do now: Keep the money in the bank and take it easy. They eat and drink and have fun like that man. They live in an endless fiesta. And they go on

accumulating more, they go on exploiting and living happily off the work of the others. Like that man in the Gospel: because that man by himself couldn't have gathered all those harvests that wouldn't fit into his barns, he did it with the labor of others.”

REBECA: “The bad part about wealth is that it makes them poor in God's eyes, poor in love.”

OLIVIA: “And they're very unfortunate in the eyes of God, because the richer a man is, the more he has exploited. And then he owes all that money, that sweat that he's stolen from the worker. Some are poorer than others in the eyes of God, and the richest are the poorest in God's eyes.”

“The richest one is the one who's devoted himself to screwing others, so he's the worst for the poor people, so he's the poorest in God's eyes.”

“The ones that are the most miserable (those that are most lacking in love) are the ones that have the most riches.”

“But Jesus speaks of the one that ‘piles up riches for himself.’ He's not against big harvests, he's against piling them up just for yourself. Like that man did: to keep them and rest and enjoy himself the rest of his life.”

“Neither of the two sons-of-bitches had a right to that inheritance; all of it was the people's money. Just as it was everybody's wealth that man wanted to store in his barns. Who says he could enjoy all by himself that great harvest, if he didn't harvest it all by himself.”

“And even less inherit it.”

66.

The Good Servant and the Evil Servant

(Luke 12:41–46)

Then Peter asked Jesus: "Lord, did you give this example just for us, or for everybody?"

I: "What Jesus has previously said is that we have to be prepared, and that the Son of Man would come like a thief in the night. Peter asks him if he's saying that for everybody or only for the apostles. Jesus doesn't answer him directly; he gives him another example: a master that goes away and leaves a servant in charge of his property. This can be a good servant who has charge of the other servants."

But if that servant thinks his master will be late in coming, and he begins to mistreat the other servants and the maids, and begins to eat and get drunk, then his master will return when least expected, and at an hour not announced; and he will give him the most terrible punishment, condemning him to suffer the same fate as the infidels.

I: "Why is it that Christ doesn't answer Peter directly but gives him another example? And what did he mean by that example?"

GIGI: "First we must ask ourselves who the master is, and what it is that he leaves his servant charged with, and then we might see if it applies to everyone or is only for some. Isn't the master Christ, and also the people at the same time?"

I: "Maybe it can be explained this way: the Christ that is leaving is an individual person, and the Christ that is returning is the people. In other

Gospel passages we've seen that the return of the Son of Man will come when he comes back as the people."

GIGI: "I believe that what Christ has left in our charge is history, humanity's evolutionary progress toward a just society. There are people who work for this revolution and who worry about it, and there are people who oppose it by exploiting, mistreating their neighbors."

I: "What Gigi says is quite right. But I think Jesus is referring here to the hierarchy of his church. Peter has asked him, and he asks him, in the name of the hierarchy, if he's referring to them. Jesus answers that there are good and evil administrators. The evil ones are the ones who think the master is going to be late in coming and who mistreat the other servants and devote themselves to feasts and sprees. In the Gospel according to Saint Matthew it says that they 'drink with the drunkards.' It's not that they are really drunk but that they're celebrating with the drunkards."

GIGI: "It's clear that he's referring to the church leaders who attend the parties of the bourgeoisie, the exploiters."

FELIPE: "It seems to me that Jesus gave that example for the leaders; it refers to the leaders, whether they're the church leaders or the political leaders. Why make this distinction? And what God leaves to all his servants are the material possessions that we have in life, all the riches of the earth, that ought to be divided up among everybody and that nobody ought to be deprived of. But they do deprive, the people that are living high with banquets and parties and great feasts and sprees in their clubs, all at the people's expense, wasting and squandering among a few people what belongs to everybody."

WILLIAM: "And that business about mistreating the other servants, that's repression, which always goes with exploitation."

I: "But I believe Jesus was thinking of the leaders that he was leaving, the leaders of his church. They've asked him if he's referring to them specially or to everybody. With this example it seems to me that he's telling them: to you."

GIGI: "But as Felipe says, too, you can apply this to any leader in general."

I: "That Colombian cardinal and those Colombian bishops, for example, who are allied with the bourgeoisie; they get drunk with them, so to speak, though personally they may not drink much. They've just opposed a strike of bank clerks that was supported by a group of priests, and they've just

applauded the repressive measures of the government, including the measures taken against those priests. They do that because they believe the coming of Christ is very far off and that the kingdom of God won't be until the next world. And Christ says at the end that they'll be treated like the infidels, the pagans; this is one more proof that he's talking to the people of his church. In Matthew it says the punishment that they'll receive is the punishment of the ‘hypocrites.’ To Christ the hypocrites are the Pharisees: this is another proof that he's talking to the religious leaders.”

OSCAR: “When all of us, young and old, agree to fight against injustice, then Jesus begins to appear at the doors of the houses. When we don't want anybody anymore to be boss over anybody else but to have everybody equal, everybody the same, that's when Christ will be coming or is already come.”

A worker: “It's hard to reach that point. If that's the way it is, that he won't come until then, it seems to me he'll never come, because that society of equality that he's talking about seems false to most people, everybody getting together like Jesus says.”

OSCAR: “Those people that are opposed will be eliminated; that'll be the punishment he talks about here.”

GLORIA: “So you think he's not going to come?”

The worker: “I don't say he's not going to come.”

GLORIA: “That he's still not coming, you say.”

OSCAR: “That new society can come at any moment, when least expected, and it can catch us by surprise.”

I: “And therefore we have to be ready for that change that can come at any moment.”

OSCAR: “When we talk about the second coming many of us have an idea that we're going to see Christ in person. I think we're seeing him right now. Every place we're seeing a social change, it's him coming and he's already coming to judge.”

GIGI: “Two thousand years ago Christ gave us an idea of a society of love. It's very hard for this to happen suddenly, just as our comrade says. We're not all going to become good overnight. But since then lots of things have happened. We now have a social organization, socialism, which certainly didn't create for the first time the idea of love but it does give love a possible form among people. Humanity will have evolved a lot in the next two thousand years and we're going to have a really perfect society (but I

don't believe it'll take two thousand years; it'll be much sooner). People who think there'll never be a just society, that people will never stop being selfish, they're the ones that are thinking that Christ is never coming, at least not in this world, in history."

DONALD: "But people who want the change *are* hoping for it."

I: "And why was it that Christ didn't answer Peter directly but did it with another example?"

ALEJANDRO: "Maybe he didn't tell him yes or no, because that way it could be applied to others, as Felipe has applied it. He gave an example that can be applied very directly to the apostles, but he didn't want to tell them: only to you. It's an example that can be applied to everybody that has social responsibilities; but he didn't want to take away from the apostles the great, the tremendous responsibility that they have."

I: "This could never have been understood clearly by just one of us. We've understood it very clearly all together. Any other comment?"

"Everything has been said."

67.

The Wedding Guests

(Luke 14:7–14)

From Managua, in a yacht, have come some fairly wealthy people and they are attending this Mass. Also present is young Dionisio, from the Communist Youth of Costa Rica.

We read that Jesus was invited to dinner in the home of an important Pharisee, and he saw how they quarrelled about the best seats. And he said:

> *When they invite you to a wedding party, do not sit in the best seat, for another guest more important than you may arrive and the one who invited you both may come to say to you: "Give your place to this man." Then you will have to go in shame to take the last seat. On the contrary, when they invite you, sit in the last place, so that when the one that invited you comes, he will say to you: "My friend, come closer."*

One of the young men of the commune (slyly): "It seems he's saying you mustn't be an exploiter but one of the exploited."

I: "The opposite of the exploiter isn't the exploited one but the revolutionary. He says we must be revolutionaries, and the revolutionary must take the place of the exploited, as long as society is divided into exploiters and exploited. And it's precisely from the exploited that freedom will come. And they will then occupy the first seats."

FELIPE: "He advises equality; everybody alike."

OSCAR: "He doesn't say equality; he says take the last seats."

LAUREANO: “It's the same as that other thing that Jesus said, when they asked him who was the most important, and he said the one who served. The one in the first place isn't most important.”

I: “If everyone has a spirit of service to the others, there aren't any firsts or lasts and you reach the equality that Felipe is talking about.”

CESAR: “In Cuba the millionaire sugar cutters have a very special place on the platform on the July 26 rallies. They're near Fidel because they're the ones that have worked the hardest. They're called ‘millionaires’ not because they have millions of pesos that they've taken from others but because they've cut more than a million arrobas of sugar cane; they're the ones who've given most to society. Just as in capitalist society the rich are in first place, there the most selfless workers are the ones in the place of honor.”

FELIPE: “Here it's just the opposite.”

LAUREANO: “That business about the millionaire cutters is because they've won the friendship of the people. It's the people that put you up there; you don't put yourself up there. Because I became like the people, that's why the people put me in this place. That's why Christ says that he's going to be taken from the last place and put in the first place.”

OSCAR: “Or better, the ones that humble themselves, the people send them to the first place.”

LAUREANO: “The ones that serve most.”

OSCAR: “They are put at the head.”

CESAR: “And this happens with the millionaire cutters, because the workers have always been at the low end of the table, and then comes the revolution and it gives the workers their right place. It takes them from the place where they put them and gives them the place they deserve, a place of honor.”

> *So you will receive honors from those who are seated at table with you. Because he who is raised up will be humbled and he who is humbled will be raised up*.

FELIPE: “That's exactly what the revolution is: to flip the tortilla.”

I: “And that is the subversion of the kingdom of heaven. ‘Subvert’ comes from the Latin *subvertere*, which means to put down what is up and up what is down.”

ALEJANDRO: “It seems to me very important what the Gospel says here. I realized that everybody always wants to be the leader and to dominate. They want to be more important than others, and that's always a reason for division in the left: that everybody wants to be on top. And that's a selfish attitude. You think you're a revolutionary and you're really not being one. What you want is to dominate. What you want is power. Jesus saw that at that dinner, when he saw that everybody wanted the first seats.”

> *When you give a lunch or a supper, do not invite your friends, or your brothers and sisters, or your relatives, or your rich neighbors; because they in turn will invite you, and you will thus be repaid. On the contrary, when you give a party, invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, and the blind*.

I: “He's talking to the rich. Because he says this to the one who invited him, and according to the Gospel, he was an important Pharisee. And he speaks to him of his ‘rich neighbors.’ And only a rich person can invite the rich.”

“But a party with poor people, lame people, blind people, would that be joyful?”

MARCELINO: “It ought to be joyful.”

TOMAS: “He advises this because then that rich man would be with God, because God is with the humble, and if he invites those people God is at his party, and that party is joyful.”

I: “And the parties of the rich aren't joyful?”

OSCAR: “They're joyful for them, but they're not really joyful, because they're only among themselves. It's a selfish joy.”

One of those who came on the yacht, a lawyer: “Let's not fall into demagoguery. If anyone gives a party it's to be joyful, to have a good time. And Christianity isn't opposed to joy. And let's be realistic: if I give a party and don't invite my friends but invite some beggars, that could be a work of charity but it's not fun, not a party. You mustn't take this literally.”

MARCELINO: “And I'm not going to have fun at a party with other people that are not of my class, because they can't be my friends.”

The lawyer: “Exactly.”

MARCELINO: “But then he means there shouldn't be social classes, so that all of us can be capable of being friends and of being able to enjoy

ourselves at the same party.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me very good, what Jesus says to them here, and I think it not only refers to giving a party but to distributing everything among all the others, and the distribution ought to be made among the needy and not among people who already have and who don't need.”

MANUELITO: “Yes, but the distribution shouldn't just be of material things, but of everything, because people have many other needs. And that's why he gives the example of a party; parties aren't just to satisfy hunger.”

OLIVIA: “It's about the distribution of everything. The rich really do share their things with others, in their parties, their clubs, all the life they lead. They spend a lot of money among themselves, and they give each other gifts, and the money never leaves their group. And then Jesus tells them they ought to share with the poor, not share with the rich.”

PANCHO: “Unfortunately we act that way, too. When we have a meeting, a lunch, anything, we also invite our closest friends, our best friends, and not others that maybe need that food more. That's very common among us.”

ALEJANDRO: “We have to understand what a party is, what's the meaning. Because a party's not charity. To feed people I can simply cook a pile of food and give it to people that are hungry. But a party's something more than that, it's not just giving food, like we were saying. It's also something spiritual. There are elegant people and rich people that you can't get together with at a party because they don't have anything intelligent to say to you. I'd rather be in the midst of thinking, poor people like here—right?—than in the middle of elegant people, mental cripples, with shitty ideas, as we say, because you can't understand them. On the other hand, you can be in a very agreeable party spirit with drinks and food, with your people, with worthy people spiritually and ideologically. But parties shouldn't be charity. Those rich people that give a party from time to time for poor people, they're not doing anything, just putting a band-aid on misery. Some of them, on their birthday, they give a party for prisoners or old folks, but afterwards they go home to their houses to have a ball, the real party with other people.”

I: “Jesus advises them to break with their families, with their circle of rich people, with their class. And the fact that they invite the poor to the party means that the poor stop being poor, and that in society everything is shared equally: health, clothing, culture. Because a party with crippled, sick, ignorant people isn't a very good party.”

LAUREANO: “And sharing those things can't be done individually; we have to do it together, in a revolutionary society.”

I: “In a revolutionary society, as Laureano says, or in a Christian one, which is the same, everyone will be seated at the banquet of life and abundance.”

MARIITA: “For rich people names and family are very important, and that's why Jesus tells them the first thing they must do is break the family ties: don't invite ‘your brothers and sisters,’ ‘your relatives.’”

FELIPE: “I still think, Ernesto, that this isn't a party. It's not really a party. As I said before, it's about sharing. Because the bosses, they do it among their relatives and friends and among those of their social class. And Jesus says how they must do it.”

DIONISIO: “The fact that a rich man gives parties for the poor is very bad: it means that there's somebody that has enough for everybody and there are others who don't have anything. And there wouldn't be any need for anyone to give alms, if they hadn't taken the workers’ wages away from them. What's needed is not for the rich to give more alms but for the poor, by organizing themselves, to make poverty disappear. And sharing the wealth of a society, it should be not just with the elite; everybody should come in on it; that's the basis of a revolutionary society. We mustn't imitate what the rich do, in the selfish enjoyment of their wealth. And the most important conclusion, as the other comrades have already said, is that we must struggle so that there'll be an equal enjoyment of all the wealth.”

TOMAS: “When there's no poor people, that's a party.”

I: “Inviting the poor, the crippled, the lame, means that they'll be able to enjoy all the country's amusements, the clubs, the health resorts, the hotels: what has happened in Cuba.”

ALEJANDRO: “Before that we have to educate the poor, cure the sick, dress the badly clothed, so they can be at a party, in a club, and have it be a joyful party.”

> *And you will be happy. For they cannot pay you, but you will have your recompense in the resurrection of the just.*

“It seems to me that happiness is love.”

“On the other hand, the prize of the rich, the prize the system gives them, is that of their selfishness, and it's a very sad prize, according to

Jesus.”

FELIPE: “He says the recompense of these others will be in the resurrection of the just. It seems to me that what he means is that when the people realize that somebody who has died has served other people, then that man is resurrected among the people. He's respected, and that's his recompense, it seems to me. There's a remembrance of him, and sorrow that he's gone and so they feel it in the community. It seems to me that's his recompense; I don't know if I'm mistaken.”

ESPERANZA: “That's not much, that they should just remember me.”

CESAR: “It depends on what you mean by the resurrection of the just, because that resurrection could be like in a classless society, living in the memory of the people. Or it could be communion with God after death. The two things can exist together, and they are certain, once the people take power, to live in the memory of the people, and besides to live in communion with God after death.”

I: “Esperanza is right; it's not much that they should just remember you, that maybe they'd name a street after you.”

FELIPE: “But there are others who stay alive in the memory of the people, but like something negative. People say: ‘He's better off dead!’”

I: “What do you think about so many anonymous heroes, who have died for the people, and their heroism has never been known? Leonel Rugama, the young poet who died in the urban warfare in Managua, has stayed very much alive in the memories of many, but he had written that one had to die without expecting to be remembered ‘in the press or in history.’”

DIONISIO: “He was the one who sat in the last seat and will be taken to the first seat. The best thing about Leonel Rugama was his ideals of justice, and the resurrection of the just will come on the day when the justice he died for is a reality. The life and death of Leonel Rugama will be justified because he won't have died in vain. He'll be resurrected among the people through the works of the people who'll be doing what he wanted.”

I: “Dionisio has done well to notice that little word that Jesus said, the ‘just.’ Because he has spoken of the resurrection of the ‘just’ and he doesn't speak of the resurrection of everybody, including the exploiters. And we already know what the word ‘just’ means in the Bible. Justice is social justice and liberation; the unjust one is the oppressor, and the just one is the liberator. God is absolute justice; and his main attribute is that of the Just One: The one who punishes injustice, and the one who comes to the

oppressed and listens to the cries of the poor, and the one who liberates. And the just are the ones who have struggled for the establishment of justice on earth. They are going to be resurrected, according to Jesus, and they are the ones who have given the party they're talking about here, the sharing of joy and abundance in the world. Dionisio, although he's an atheist, has expressed this resurrection very well, because the faith in resurrection that Marxist atheists have is very similar to that of Christians. People have believed that there's a great difference between Christians and Marxists about this business of resurrection, but it's not true. There are a great number of songs, poems, and posters, that say that Che is alive, and that many others are alive, all those who have given their lives for the people. It's not just to be alive in the memory of the people but to be alive *in* the people. Dead as a person but personally alive with the life of total humanity. 'HOMELAND OR DEATH, WE SHALL OVERCOME,' it seems to me Fidel explained in a speech saying that even when dead, if we died for the people, we shall overcome. It's like what Christ said: 'Even though he is dead he will live.' And this is the same communion with God that Cesar speaks of. In the Bible, God is love, understanding love to be social justice, and to be joined to this love is to be alive forever. Jesus has begun by saying: 'When they invite you to a wedding party.' And it's because this great party of humanity of which we've talked will celebrate a wedding party with Love. What does Esperanza say?"

ESPERANZA: "Now I agree."

I: "So now you do find hope, right?"

68.

“If You Do Not Become as Children”

(Matthew 18:1–5)

On that occasion the disciples approached Jesus and asked him: “Who is most important in the kingdom of heaven?”

TERESITA: “From the question they asked it's clear they wanted to be very important.”

ALEJANDRO: “From Jesus’ answer we can see that, after all, in the kingdom some are more important than others. But the most important ones are different from the ones they thought.”

LAUREANO: “Their desire to be outstanding wasn't bad. The one who's struggling for a revolution also tries to be outstanding. But you have to see what kind of importance they want to have.”

Then Jesus called a child, put him in their midst, and said: “To tell you the truth, if you don't change and become like children, you're not going to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

MARCELINO: “The first thing I see is that the child is good and knows no malice. Maybe because the child is only just created and is closer to God. And to enter the kingdom, we must get rid of all the evil that we've picked up as we've grown up.”

WILLIAM: “Evil that's mostly part of the system and that wasn't in the child.”

GLORIA: “And children too, because they're pure, aren't oppressors, they don't exploit anybody; instead they can be oppressed and exploited. And I

think for that reason too we have the example of the child, because that's the way we ought to be, without the urge to dominate that grown-up people usually have."

LAUREANO: "I think it's all very clear: he gives the example of the child because children are the ones who serve. Children never ask to be served; they're just told to serve. And it's clear that the one that serves the others is the most important one."

I said that in the language of Jesus, and also in other ancient languages, they used the same word for "servant" as for "child." Legally children were in the same situation as slaves, and in the thinking of that time they weren't clearly distinguished from one another any more than they were distinguished in the language. And what is the practical lesson that Jesus is giving us here?

LAUREANO: "It's quite clear and simple, I think: we must serve others."

OLIVIA: "And I see that Jesus here too wants to teach us equality. Because all children consider themselves equal. Poor kids can walk with rich kids and they don't even realize they're walking with rich kids because, in their simplicity, all kids are equal to them. Then out of this we get the lesson of living all equal, in a life of simplicity and equality."

WILLIAM: "The child is a communist, as humanity was communist at the start. But the system that we've had for thousands of years makes children selfish. Teresita and I try to train our children so they won't lose their communist tendency. When Juan asks if something belongs to him, we tell him it belongs to him and to his little sister and to Elvis and to Ernesto and to Alejandro."

I said that "change in attitude" is an expression we often find in the Gospel and it used to be translated as "conversion." Here Jesus makes it clear what this change is: "if you don't change and become like children." It's to make us new people and to organize society again the way it was in the beginning and the way children are before they're corrupted by the system.

ESPERANZA: "And maybe the child that he put in their midst was an orphan child."

So then, the most important ones in the kingdom of heaven are the ones who humble themselves and become like this child.

OSCAR: “You're screwed then if you try to get into the kingdom of heaven, man. Hell! Am I going to be letting them exploit me and not do anything? Am I going to be humiliated forever? [After a pause] I think that, like in every political movement, there are some who lead. Jesus is saying there that we mustn't expect to have a place next to him because we haven't fought yet; we're together in the same movement, but if I don't fight he can't give me any place. The disciples were thinking that they'd pick that up free for nothing.”

“But the struggle in this movement is to serve others and not to dominate.”

OSCAR: “I'm talking in the sense of a real revolution, where nobody ever thinks of getting ahead of anybody, only of serving everybody.”

FELIPE: “I think too that we can say to Oscar that being humiliated is one thing and humbling yourself is another. If I humble myself through my own free will, that's very different.”

OLIVIA: “And it can happen too that you don't want to be humiliated, and you prefer to be with the ones who humiliate the masses; or else you identify with the masses, who are being forcibly humiliated.”

OSCAR: “There it teaches that you ought to humble yourself and it's good. But it doesn't mean you ought to let yourself get squashed, and that's it, that's the end! It seems to me there's no point in that. And Jesus isn't teaching us that.”

WILLIAM: “This humbling yourself that Christ talks about is the renunciation of selfishness, and only through this renunciation can we free ourselves from all oppression.”

I: “In those times there were political movements that could seem revolutionary, but they really weren't, because their objective wasn't the conquest of power by the people but the domination of one class over the others and of Israel over the other peoples. And when Jesus was talking of a new kingdom, the disciples understood him with this same mentality. That's why they've asked Jesus who is going to be the most ‘important,’ expecting that they'll all be in important jobs. And what Jesus does is something very revolutionary: to put a child in front of them and say that's the most important one. It's almost as if he'd put a slave in front of them.”

And he who receives in my name a child like this one, receives me.

LAUREANO: “And that's even more radical, because he identifies himself with the defenseless one, with the weak one. He says we must see his person in the oppressed one.”

FELIPE: “In other words, anybody who struggles for a child struggles for the cause of Jesus Christ too. And that's what the revolutionaries do who struggle so there'll be day nurseries, maternity rooms, kindergartens, schools. And they struggle not just for the children but for all the unprotected.”

A lady: “Here's an example right in our community: we keep our children out of school so they can work for us, and that's exploiting children, and that's like exploiting Christ himself.”

FELIPE: “But above all the child has to be taught all we're reading here, what's said here about the kingdom of heaven and about the children, the little ones. And this is more important than what they teach in school, because there are people that know a lot, but everything they know they use to screw the humble ones, the little ones.”

(Against the church door there's a noisy bang from a stone that little John, the son of William and Teresita, has thrown with his sling.)

69.

The “Scandal”

(Matthew 18:6–9)

Anyone who makes any of these little ones who believe in me stumble, it would be better for that person to be thrown into the sea with a millstone around his neck.

I said that last Sunday we heard the passage where Jesus talks about children, and we realized that by “children” Jesus meant all the weak and oppressed too. Here he clearly refers to the oppressed when he shifts from “children” to “little ones.” Here also there is a word that has traditionally been badly translated as “scandal,” when it means an obstacle placed on your path to make you fall, what in Latin is called *scandalum*, and this is not what we mean now by “scandalize.” Jesus isn't talking about people who make other people fall into sin; he's just talking about people who make the little ones stumble.

EDUARDO: “And the little ones aren't only kids. They can be grown people.”

OLIVIA: “Even though Jesus was maybe thinking especially about children or because he saw that child there is why he began to talk about oppression; because when there's injustice children are the first to suffer, and it's seeing children suffer that makes us suffer so much, their parents and their older brothers and sisters. And the capitalists are the ones that are an obstacle so children can't grow up and develop like men and women. And those children, if they get to grow up, it's only to have other children just as oppressed.”

ALEJANDRO: “I think the person who's an obstacle to the child (a stumbling block, right?) is the one who brings him up badly, so as to make him a slave of the system, destroying his personality. And they do this with all the little ones, not just with the children of the poor but with the children of the rich too. And those are the people Jesus says we have to get rid of, maybe not in such a hard way as he says, throwing them into the water, but we'll have to get rid of them some way.”

OSCAR: “Alejandro, the rich are always making poor people stumble, making them sin, because they stuff them with the ideas of the system and they make them accept all the injustices. And they're a stumbling block for the people, because they prevent the people from making progress.”

Woe to the people who create the obstacles! Obstacles are necessary, but God help the one who's the cause of them!

WILLIAM: “There always have to be obstacles to the advancement of humanity; it's a historical necessity, because every evolution is made by overcoming obstacles. There are obstacles that are natural ones and there are other obstacles set up by people themselves; and Christ says God help the person who's an obstacle to human advancement.”

ESPERANZA: “He says God help him because every obstacle to human advancement has to be eliminated.”

And if your hand or your foot is acting like an obstacle to you, cut it off and throw it away; because it's better for you to go through life with a hand missing or a foot missing than to be cast into eternal fire with your two hands and your two feet. And if your eye is acting like an obstacle to you, tear it out and throw it away; because it's better to go through life with just one eye than to be cast with your two eyes into hell's fire.

LAUREANO: “I think that can mean your family, or any other relatives you may have. He says you have to be extreme; if anything's an obstacle, you have to cut it off.”

ALEJANDRO: “And not just your family; anything closer to you, on your person, if it's an obstacle, you have to cut if off; you have to be extreme in that too.”

PANCHO: “These words of Christ can be used too by an evil government that wants to get rid of people that are obstacles to it.”

OSCAR: “And they *do* do it. But Christ isn't talking about them; he's talking about us. We ought to cut off anything that keeps us from entering the kingdom, even though the thing is something that's a part of our own person. And a while back he talked about what we've got to do with the ones who are oppressing the little people. Whoever's getting in the way can't be saved: into the water with them!”

“The ‘hell's fire’ mentioned here,” I said, “in Hebrew is literally ‘Gehenna's fire.’ Gehenna was the dump heap of Jerusalem, where the trash was burned, and according to Isaiah the bodies of Israel's enemies were thrown there too.”

> *Do not scorn any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father*.

I said that in Hebrew “angel” has the concrete meaning of messenger. Some have interpreted Jesus as speaking of the children's ‘guardian angels,’ but what he's saying is simply that God is always receiving the children's messengers (as the ambassadors of a powerful nation are received at court).

OLIVIA: “The ones fighting in the mountains, maybe those are the ambassadors, the angels, the ones that are defending the oppressed.”

I: “The messengers of the little ones are in direct contact with God. That's what Christ says. And that's very beautiful, that phrase of his.”

FELIPE: “It always seems that the weak have nobody to defend them. The people, the *campesinos*, let's say, it seems we're abandoned. But there are always people struggling for our freedom, even some upper-class people, and that's how come there were those angels.”

OSCAR: “I was just thinking that in a community there's always a leader, and that leader is a kind of messenger to God, and God sends his message to the community through that leader. And that leader can be William, Ernesto, Laureano, or anybody.”

“Or you,” I said to Oscar.

OSCAR: “Or me; anybody that can make the community see what's good and what's evil; those people are like ambassadors to God carrying the message from the community to God and from God to the community.”

JUAN BOSCO: “And Che Guevara could be an angel?”

OLIVIA: “He, and everybody like him who has died, and all the ones they're killing right now, they're like envoys from the poor to God; they put us in contact with God, that's what Christ is saying.”

PANCHO: “Then we really ought to feel proud, us little people, because we're greater than any of those bastards.”

I: “That's what Christ is talking about here, about the greatness that little people have.”

FELIPE: “I think he has said that the bosses ought to be like children, very humble people, like representatives of the people, simple people, very good people. And all the people ought to be like them too, humble, simple, just, and that way they'll be in close contact with God. And anybody that's screwing those humble people, we'll have to find a way to get rid of them.”

I asked if anybody had anything to add.

“Nothing more.”

70.

The Brother's Pardon

(Matthew 18:15–22)

If your brother has sinned, scold him all alone. If he heeds you, you have gained your brother.

ELVIS: “Very good advice, that. Because if you see someone doing something bad and you let it pass, and say, ‘What's it to me?’ that person doesn't reform. But if you make him see that he's done wrong, maybe he can reform. That's what it means there about he has gained his brother.”

ALEJO: “Another possibility is for you to accuse your brother before the policeman or before the judge. And Jesus says no, that you should go and talk with him in private and make him see that he's done wrong, and that way maybe you can gain him.”

TOMAS: “He says that, it seems to me, so that we can live under better conditions. And let's not live the way we sometimes live, that if someone does something bad, the others don't correct him but just concentrate on talking against the comrade, right?”

PANCHO: “This is probably for a community in which everybody is very aware. But if somebody like us goes to somebody to try to correct him, that person would say: ‘Man, don't be silly, don't be giving me advice when you're doing worse things.’”

FELIPE: “In a Managua parish where there's a mixture of exploiters, rich people, bandits, maybe even murderers, this doesn't work. There people can't correct each other. But Jesus is talking to the community of his disciples, a community like this one, in which, just the same, we're not all perfect; we can have faults.”

LAUREANO: “But the truth is that we do very few evil things.”

But if he doesn't heed you, then call one or two more, so that any accusation can be based on the word of two or three witnesses.

TOMAS: “It seems to me he says that because the other person is maybe already angry. That's why he must bring two more witnesses, so they can see he's not angry with the other one. He only wants to reform him, and he wants harmony. If not, tomorrow or some other day the other one can get even sorer and they could even kill each other, see? And then you have even more troubles.”

ALEJANDRO: “It seems to me that stuff about the witnesses is because three of them are like a small community court.”

If he doesn't heed them then tell the congregation; and if he doesn't heed the congregation, then he must be considered a pagan or a tax collector.

I: “The publicans or tax collectors were the ones who collaborated with the Roman occupation, and the religious Jews considered them excluded from the Jewish community just like the pagans. But here Jesus isn't concerned with religious questions. He's saying that if somebody does evil and doesn't reform he ought to be excommunicated from the community. The unjust person (and not the person of another religion), that's the one that ought to be considered by us as ‘pagan’ or ‘publican.’”

ALEJANDRO: “Which is like saying the oppressor or the collaborator of the oppressor.”

“He has removed himself from the community. Suppose one day there's a community effort on all the islands to grow wheat, to grow rice, to grow fruit. There's one guy that acts selfishly and works only for himself. He has removed himself from the community. He's outside, but we have to fight to get him back in.”

FELIPE: “For Christ the ones who don't believe in God are the ones who don't love their neighbor, the ones who don't want to live in harmony with their companions.”

TOMAS: “Those you've got to throw out, of course. They would break the unity. They'd be like ghosts.”

We all laughed. He continued: “What we have to watch out for is so that somebody doesn't go on being a nuisance. That's why you say: ‘See, I'm going to church to straighten this out’; it's not because they're going to beat you there or do you any harm. But to go to San Carlos and look for the cops, that's what pagans do.”

I: “If the community is united there's no need to carry the quarrel outside, right? What Christ says is very interesting: You mustn't accuse anyone to the police judge in San Carlos. It's the community that must judge.”

TOMAS: “Yes, we're together here, and here we can solve our problems.”

OSCAR: “I think it's better for them to set the cops on you, instead of the whole town, the community, shouting ‘whore’ at me. I'd feel like shit then; I'd rather have a cop take me to jail.”

PANCHO: “I feel like Oscar: if one of us commits a robbery right here and right away they show him up and we all see his face, well, it would be terrible. It's better for a cop to take you to jail and you pay a fine. That wouldn't be so shameful because the cop is a worse robber.”

I: “In Cuba it's the people that judge lawsuits and differences within a town, and they do this with admirable wisdom, by means of what they call ‘Popular Tribunals.’”

MYRIAM: “It's clear they're doing what the Bible says.”

FELIPE: “And if our Nicaraguan society changed and became like Christ wants, we wouldn't have an authority and an army that exist only to screw the poor and not to defend them. We'd keep united on a basis of understanding and dialogue and not on a basis of screwing each other, throwing each other in jail or punching each other, like now when we have the cops.”

> *I tell you the truth: what you tie in this world will be tied also in heaven, and what you untie in this world will be untied in heaven*.

I: “This means that everything the community decides will be ratified by God. In the Gospel according to Saint Matthew the word ‘heaven’ means God (because of the Jewish custom of not mentioning God). This is the same power that Jesus formerly gave to Peter, and now he says the whole community has it.”

ALEJANDRO: “So the verdict of the people can't be appealed.”

OSCAR: “Look, Ernesto, if the community doesn't pardon me, and I beg God's pardon directly, wouldn't there be a possibility of being pardoned?”

ALEJANDRO: “And who has he offended? A brother, right? Well, why should he go and beg the pardon of somebody else who isn't the one he's offended?”

ELVIS: “I don't think there are two justices, one of the community and another of God. If you don't beg pardon of the community, what other pardon can you get, if the community is Christ himself? It seems to me that guy is screwed.”

> *I also tell you that if two of you here on earth agree to ask for something in prayer, my Father who is in heaven will grant it to you. Because wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them*.

TOMAS: “The agreeing that's talked about here, it seems to me that it's this way: all of us here are in agreement, God's also in agreement with us. I say to Manuel, for example, or some other guy, or anybody: ‘Man, let's come to an agreement to do something.’ Right? Then that one gets somebody else and now there's three of us. Then I think the thing gets going, that God comes to an agreement with you, because the three people are in agreement. You could almost say they're like the three Divine Persons. And the three Divine Persons are like a single true God. And the three persons who are in agreement would be three who are united with God.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that being united in the name of God is loving each other. There are others who are united, but not through love.”

WILLIAM: “For example, in a capitalistic company, or in an army of repression.”

ALEJANDRO: “Those people are together, but they're not united. They've become bastards. That's not what we call unity!”

OSCAR: “And people that come together in a church to celebrate communion aren't either, all mixed together rich and poor.”

OLIVIA: “Those people are just looking for individual salvation for each one, and not unity. Or they go to ask God for money or think only of themselves. Money's very important; without money you can't live, but it ought to be divided up.”

LAUREANO: “But you can too live without money, Doña Olivia. In a perfect society there won't be any need for money. Then everybody'll have everything they need to live. There'll be loads of beans; there'll be loads of sugar and all that stuff, clothes, and, you know, all the rest.”

WILLIAM: “Yes, I believe if we ask God as individuals, God's not going to make a miracle for us; but if we unite to ask God for something, we're going to get it, through ourselves, through our unity; because if we're agreed about asking we'll also be agreed about acting. And that unity is Christ himself; he's the community, he's the people.”

FELIPE: “And from that community they've already expelled the one who was evil, the unjust one.”

OSCAR: “And if unfortunately that guy that they expelled like that is innocent?”

I: “The people's verdict is the verdict of God, says Christ. According to Christ the people make no mistakes; what the people say will be approved in heaven.”

FELIPE: “It seems like magic, but I think he says that because when two or three are together it's because there's understanding and love between them. If there's love, Christ is among them; he is love among them. And then they can do everything, because love is what's going to change the world.”

WILLIAM: “And this has been said before but it's worth repeating: Cuba is now a community united by the love that people have for each other. And Christ is there with them even though they don't realize it. And there what the Gospel says is fulfilled, that when people unite to help each other and love each other, they get everything they want, and that's why the revolution has made all those miracles there.”

ADAN: “And there, if somebody's screwing the community, they get rid of that person.”

“The Gospel says it very clearly, but if in society there's no love, we pick up the book and read, and we get all confused; we get confused because we don't have love, to fulfill the Gospel we must be like the Cubans.”

WILLIAM: “Whether or not they believe Christ is in their midst is secondary, it seems to me. There are Christians who are very aware of Christ and it does them no good, because if they're not united to the other people, Christ isn't with them. It's the kind of Christianity that's broadcast on that program ‘The Voice of Hope.’”

OSCAR: “And I imagine Christ isn't concerned about his name. Why should he want us to be saying and saying his name and not love each other? On the other hand, there's others who don't believe in him and who love each other. Well, that's what he wants, for them to love each other.”

I said that in the language of the Bible “name” doesn't mean the name of a person but the person himself, or also what we now call the character or the spirit of a person. When Christ speaks of gathering in his name he doesn't mean that they're going to be mentioning his name but that they'll be gathered in his spirit, in agreement with his teachings and his message. That community will have such great power because he will be in the midst of them.

> *Then Peter went and asked Jesus: “Lord, how many times, if my brother does me evil, do I have to forgive him?* As *many as seven times?” Jesus answered him: “I do not say as many as seven times, but as many as seventy times seven.”*

FELIPE: “That's sure tough, right?”

I: “It's tough for the one who forgives but for the other one it's nice.”

LAUREANO: “Well, hell, are you going to let them screw you? It's unfair for them to be screwing you.”

ALEJANDRO: “That's what the community's for, to correct that individual, to run him out if necessary. Because, according to the Gospel, this is about a ‘brother,’ another member of the community.”

I: “There are people who offend you, of course. The question is whether you're going to forgive them or going to go on hating them.”

OLIVIA: “Well, if we have hatred and bitterness, that's the end of the community.”

LAUREANO: “But if I'm in a community and I know they're going to pardon me every time I shit on them, I'll go on shitting on them forever. That's why I think you shouldn't forgive any bully.”

OSCAR: “Look: if I offend somebody and I beg his pardon and he forgives me, it seems to me that I'm ashamed of what I've done; I'm not going to do it again. There he says seventy times seven, but he knows what he's saying. Why did he say it? Because if he does it once, he's not going to do it twice, because we're in a community of conscience.”

LAUREANO: “The first thing we have to do is to have that community.”

I: “We're beginning to have it. Jesus tells us how that community must be organized, how to be united, and how to forgive each other.”

OSCAR: “It would be good to be discussing this every Sunday, to understand it better and to be more aware.”

71.

The Servant Who Wouldn't Forgive

(Matthew 18:23–35)

This is the parable of the servant who owed ten talents (many millions) to a king, and the king was going to sell him with all his family, but later he took pity on him and forgave him the debt. The man later throttled another servant because he owed him a small amount, and he put him in jail until he paid the whole debt.

> *Then the Lord sent for him and said to him: "Evil servant! I forgave you all that debt of yours, because you begged me to. You too should have taken pity on your companion as I took pity on you." And the Lord was so angered that he ordered him punished until he paid the whole debt. And Jesus ended by saying: "So also my heavenly Father will do with you if each one does not forgive his brother in his heart."*

"We will be evil too if we ask God's pardon without pardoning our neighbor."

"Then we don't even have the right to ask for pardon."

"But if you forgive your neighbor, then you do have a right to be forgiven."

"But I believe one thing: any who ask forgiveness of their neighbor, it's like asking God's forgiveness. It's really not God that forgives directly; it's our neighbor who forgives us some evil that we've done. That's why we must seek our comrade's forgiveness instead of saying to God: 'God forgive me.'"

I: “It seems too that this parable is telling us that the love that people have for each other is the very love of God for us.”

MANUEL: “I believe that only when there is love can you forgive. If there's bitterness and there's no love, then there's no forgiveness. The forgiveness has to be real: you have to forget what they've done to you.”

NATALIA: “Yes, because if you're not going to forgive from the heart, you shouldn't say you forgave somebody because then you'd be lying. If you really forgave, you forgot it. But if you just *say*, ‘I forgave,’ that's nothing.”

“Notice that Jesus specifies that detail: that the forgiveness has to come ‘from the heart.’”

LAUREANO: “This Gospel is silly!”

Several people: “Why is it silly?”

LAUREANO: “Several people have talked, but nobody has said anything good. And I haven't found anything good to say either. All you've talked about is forgiveness and forgiveness. I don't see anything in this Gospel against injustice.”

ARMANDO: “This Gospel isn't like you say. It also talks against injustice. Because the person that wouldn't forgive, the one that owed the millions, he was really committing an injustice: he wanted to strangle another person for a few pesos that he owed him.”

JULIO: “I think this Gospel is revolutionary, because it deals with the poor and the rich. And I see here a lesson for the rich, because the first to be pardoned was rich, and the second, who couldn't pay such a tiny amount, was poor. The Lord puts rich and poor on an equal plane. He says that just as the rich guy was forgiven, the poor guy must be forgiven too. But it happens that in this society the rich are forgiven for the evil things they do but the poor are shoved into jail because they are poor. In this example Jesus is showing us the poor and the rich as equals. The millionaire was forgiven through charity, through love, and just as he was forgiven he should also forgive the other weaker person and have for him also charity, love. And we can give an example using the words of today: at present we see that the rich have no compassion for the poor. If the rich had love for the poor, and the poor for the rich, that would mean there wouldn't be rich or poor any more: that's love! So let everybody live equal. And then we wouldn't have that stuff about selling the poor man with all his family to pay what he owes. And God can't forgive their sins, then, until they stop exploiting.”

DOÑA JUSTA: “The one who had many millions was loaded down with sins.”

ARMANDO: “And who has said that forgiveness isn't revolutionary? Because the first thing you have to forgive are the economic debts. If not, you don't have that forgiveness from the heart that Christ talks about. Because if somebody is economically strangling his neighbor, how can he say that in his heart he has nothing against him? And so God is going to treat him like he treats his laborers, the ones who depend on him, the ones he exploits.”

MARCELINO: “The poor aren't the ones who must have compassion for the rich, who are strangling them; they ought to be struggling against the injustices of the rich. It's the rich who ought to take pity on the poor and stop strangling them. But when the poor are in power it will be up to the poor to have pity on the rich, because otherwise we fall into the same thing as they do; we'll become like them.”

JULIO: “It's not that those who are poor now are going to be in the place of the rich, and then we'll say: ‘Now they are the poor ones, we'll get them because now we can.’ I believe that's not the question; it's about being equal.”

CESAR: “Of course this Gospel talks about forgiveness, but I believe too that forgiveness is revolutionary. It's not necessary for the Gospel to be talking only against the rich for it to be revolutionary. Because the revolution is inside you too. As long as you haven't revolutionized yourself, you can't be a real revolutionary. If you're a revolutionary that doesn't forgive, you're not a just revolutionary, and then you're not going to be able to make a good revolution. And this Gospel today teaches us to be revolutionaries before we begin to make a revolution. You're going to make the revolution when you've been revolutionary enough, that is, when you've revolutionized yourself.”

FELIPE: “The one who owed those millions was rich, because a nobody doesn't owe that much money. It seems to me that Jesus gives the example of a rich person because he wants to give the example of an exploiter. Everything the rich have got they've stolen from us, because all their riches have been got with our labor; and now all their injustices are forgiven them, but they don't forgive us; they throw us into jail when we owe them a bit. Someday, it seems to me, God will settle accounts with them through the people and he'll collect the whole debt. But at the end Jesus says we all

must also forgive our neighbors in our hearts. Who knows if we have that capacity to forgive each other, or if we're like that rich person, like that exploiter."

BOSCO: "At the beginning he said that the kingdom of heaven *is* like a king who forgives a debt. And he tells the whole story. He means that in that society of perfect communism, we're all going to forgive everything, and anyone who doesn't forgive is going to be treated like an exploiter, like a reactionary."

ELVIS: "Yes, because we already know that the kingdom of heaven on earth will be a kingdom of love, without hatred, without bitterness, without the divisions that humanity now has."

JULIO: "I believe this too will come when there's equality and nobody owes nobody."

ALEJANDRO: "But let's move to the practical and not stick just on theory. Because here among us I see defects. Let's not concentrate just on seeing evil in exploiters. We need to practice these things a lot. Hatred, bitterness, injustice can happen and do happen in our community, among neighbors, among people in the same family, among couples, among friends. And so we too must learn in our community this practical lesson for forgiveness. We the poor must forgive each other, too. If we don't, we're not good comrades, good revolutionaries."

72.

Jesus Talks about Marriage

(Matthew 19:1–12)

Then some Pharisees approached Jesus to make him fall into a trap, and they asked him: “Is it permitted to divorce one's wife for any reason?”

MANUEL: “It was a trap, because if he said yes, they were going to say he was against marriage and if he said no, they were going to say he was against the law of Moses, which allowed divorce.”

SILVESTRE: “But they supposed he wouldn't want to say a man could leave a woman for any reason.”

CARLOS (a Spanish priest who had just married and who had come to Solentiname with his wife, Concha): “The Pharisees knew that Jesus was in favor of freedom and at the same time in favor of love, and with this question they wanted to put him up against the wall.”

MANUEL: “Like when they asked him about the woman taken in adultery; he either was for adultery or he was for cruelty.”

I: “The law of Deuteronomy said the man could abandon the woman when he was not pleased with her, and all he had to do was sign a document giving up the wife. But it didn't say the wife could leave the husband. And the Pharisees foresee that Jesus is not going to accept that injustice, and that he'll set himself up against the law, which was a law of the Bible, given by God to Moses.”

He answered them: “Have you not read in the Scriptures that he who made them in the beginning ‘made them man and wife’? He also

said: 'For this reason man will leave his father and his mother to unite with his wife and the two shall be a single one.' So that they are not two now but only one. So that what God has joined together let man not split it apart."

GOYITO: "Then he means that the law of Moses was getting a little away from the law of God. It must be that law belonged more to human beings than to God."

MARCELINO: "God created people in his image, which means he created them to be a union of people like God is, and he created them with two sexes so they could unite and be like a single God."

REBECA: "It's love that unites them, but since God is love, he says that God has united them."

CARLOS: "And what love has united, people can't separate. In this case it's the law of Moses."

I: "It also means that God created the two sexes equal, because he created the human race free, without any kind of exploitation. The loss of Paradise was the beginning of exploitation. That's why God announced to the woman that from then on she would be dominated by man. Just as he announced the future sorrows of humanity (to give birth in sorrow), exploitation in work, conflict with nature, death. But here Christ is making it clear that if exploitation wasn't with us from the beginning, there's no reason why it has to be with us forever, and that we are called to reconquer the equality and the liberty of Paradise."

GOYO: "So he *was* departing a bit from the law."

Then they asked him: "Why, then, did Moses order them to give the woman a divorce certificate, and thus to abandon her?" Jesus said to them: "Precisely through the harshness of your hearts Moses allowed you to divorce your wives. But it was not so at the beginning."

ALEJANDRO: "Moses had given them that law because it was practical."

I: "It was practical, in those times when woman had no rights. She was simply man's property, like a thing, or like a slave, and that's why Jesus says it was because of their 'harshness.' You couldn't do any more in the social system of that time, and Moses ordered that at least the man should sign a document when he rejected his wife, declaring her free."

ALEJANDRO: “It was a slightly liberating law, and therefore it was a law also given by God. But it wasn't a totally liberating law, and later there could be a better law. It was the most that people could accept in that regime of slavery.”

I: “The same thing happened with slavery: God had forbidden the Israelites to have slaves, because he had freed them all from the slavery of Egypt. But as they didn't obey, through ‘the harshness of their hearts’ (through the historical conditions of that time), in Leviticus there are also laws that regulated slavery and softened it, ordering that each jubilee year all slaves should be freed.”

FELIPE: “The Pharisees thought everything ought to stay the same, that what was in Moses’ time ought to be forever. And they believed every law was sacred. Jesus made them see that the marriage law they had was given to them by their selfishness, like the law of slavery and the law of private property.”

ELVIS: “I think paradise is really going to be the society of the future when people have no selfishness. It's clear that if Jesus talks about how people were in paradise it's to say that people are going to get to be like that; otherwise it wouldn't make sense to say how they had been in paradise.”

CARLOS: “I think the law has a temporary character. It's been useful to people, because there was a lot of injustice. But the law has slowly changed, and a moment will come when people won't need any law. Christ really came to suppress all laws except the law of love. Saint Paul also used to say: ‘Down with the law!’ But it's hard for us; we cling to the law, because we're still deep in sin.”

> *I say to you that he who dismisses his wife, except in the case of infidelity, and marries another woman, commits adultery, and he who marries the divorced woman also commits adultery.*

FELIPE: “Well, I'd say it was a mistake to leave a wife because another woman is more likable or prettier or for any reason. But at the present time the word ‘adultery,’ it seems to me, no longer has much meaning. Let's say it's an injustice.”

GOYO: “It's a bad mixture: like when you have a pure thing, a liquid for example, and you add something else, and it comes out all weak; it isn't

what it was any more. It's a falsification. That's to adulterate."

I: "It's a falsification, as Goyo said, like is done with milk and many other products, and therefore it's an injustice. It's falsifying love, adulterating it."

GLORIA: "It says the man can leave the woman in case of infidelity. And the woman, in that case, can she throw the man out?"

LAUREANO: "Women are always getting deceived!"

GLORIA: "That's *machismo.*"

GOYO: "In those times there was a law that just protected men. And Christ places man equal with woman, but not through another law, through love, which is greater than the law, and harder."

ALEJANDRO: "So he's on the side of the women because he's on the side of the weak."

I: "He's against the law, which oppresses the weak. Just as the other time, in a case of adultery, he took the part of the woman and against the law. Jesus opposed the divorce law because it was a law that oppressed women. But if prohibition of divorce is changed into a law oppressive for some men or for some women, it seems to me that Jesus wasn't going to be in agreement with this new law."

CARLOS: "I think that above this new divorce law Jesus is putting something else, which is love. If love really doesn't exist any more, then there's nothing. What difference does it make if there is or isn't a law! Are we going to say that divorce is good? No. We are going to defend love. But if the union is broken, you've already sinned, now there's nothing to be done. And it's not only a case of infidelity. Maybe some are sexually very pure, and they don't love anymore, and then the union is broken too."

OLIVIA: "What's important is for the two people to be a single thing. If it's not like that, then they have no reason to be united by any law."

CARLOS: "But out of this we get that marriage ought to be forever. Because love, what God has united, ought to be forever. And this can apply also to friendship, which ought to be forever."

GUSTAVO (a young South American who was expelled from Cuba for something to do with his private life): "I believe, like Carlos says, that this can apply to friendship, but it can also apply to another kind of relations that are misunderstood by most people, and in which there can also be true love. At present, in many countries, among advanced groups and even more among frankly revolutionary groups, we're beginning to understand that the

homosexuals have also been oppressed. And we're also beginning now to see their liberation as human beings. I believe this liberation can come only through the revolution, in socialism. It's a pity that the revolutions of the past haven't understood it this way. The Cuban Revolution, for example, that has changed so many things and has opened so many new paths to all us Latin Americans, hasn't understood this problem clearly. I believe it's a subject that ought to be placed before Christian revolutionaries, and Marxist revolutionaries, and that's why I've brought it up here."

GOYO: "According to Christ, in a union, of love or friendship, God is the one who unites. The ones who separate, if there's a separation, are human beings. Separation comes because they have adulterated, falsified love, or they've been unfaithful; they have falsified faith."

CARLOS: "The moment you don't love your wife, even though you live with her, you've already separated. Some couples may stay together, because of the law or some other outside reasons, but the only union is love. And love is always free. Maybe the church insists on non-separation so the union won't break up so easily. That seems to me a little trivial, stupid. But at any rate you can't separate calmly, because love has been smashed and that's terrible."

I: "We can sum all this up by saying that what God (love) has united cannot be separated by people, by any human law. But what God (love) does not unite, cannot be united by people, by any human law."

GOYO: "If one person is united with another, they're a single one. Let's say that I own a thing half-and-half with someone else; I can't get rid of it, sell it, because the other guy has his part also, and he can't get rid of it because both of us own it. A single thing. That's the love that God has given us."

FELIPE: "Neither the man nor the woman can get rid of each other. They'll be on an equal plane, as they were created at the beginning, man and woman, companion and companion, not master and slave. And it will be free love, without oppression, and society will be free."

I: "And Jesus, when he talks about the love of the human couple, doesn't pay attention to the law of Moses or any other law. What he mentions is paradise. I think he's telling us that love and paradise are the same thing. And also that our goal is paradise."

His disciples then said to him: "If this is the case of the man in relation to his wife, it's better not to marry." Jesus said to them: "Not all can understand this, only those to whom God has given to understand it."

FELIPE: "The ones who said that were men, and their position was a very *macho* position. As they were losing their privileges, they said it was better to be free, because it wasn't going to be like it was before."

I: "And Jesus tells them that in fact it's better to be free, but not for those human reasons but for other reasons that only God lets them understand."

CARLOS: "He gives them love to understand; it's understood by people God gives himself to, and God himself is love."

ANTENOR: "The disciples understood it later, because they didn't marry; they remained celibates, that is, free, like Christ."

GOYO: "This is an even freer love."

There are men who are born eunuchs, there are others who are made eunuchs by men, and there are others who make themselves eunuchs for love of the kingdom of heaven. Let whoever can understand this understand it.

ALEJANDRO: "There are some that are physically castrated and there are others that are psychically castrated, like the case of many priests who have been left that way by religious imposition, and those are frustrated; those also have been made eunuchs by men."

CARLOS: "I agree with Alejandro, that some are castrated by a law that imposes celibacy on the priesthood, and those two things don't necessarily have to go together. It's a quite different case when a priest has the charisma of the celibate."

I: "That's the case of those that Christ says castrate themselves, renounce sexual love, for love of the kingdom of God. Saint Paul found that celibacy was preferable so as to be freer to work for the kingdom. This is also the case of many revolutionaries, even non-Christians, who also have had to give up marriage for that cause. Che has said that revolutionaries in the vanguard must have a love for the people that is 'unique, indivisible,' and that therefore they must deprive themselves of the 'little dose of daily affection' enjoyed by the common person. This reminds me of a remark of

Fidel, when I was talking with him in Cuba: that Che had been ‘like a priest,’ through his devotion and his spirit of sacrifice. He also told me on that occasion: ‘Look: all the qualities of a priest are the qualities needed to make a good revolutionary.’ I think that one of the main qualities he was thinking of was celibacy. And Fidel himself is one who is now married only to the revolution.”

ALEJANDRO: “One who leaves his home, his wife, and his children for that cause has not been separated from love. He is separated through love to unite with them and with everyone in a greater love, what Christ calls the love of the kingdom of heaven.”

GOYO: “The one who's getting married is happy because he's going to be married; and the one who doesn't get married, because of that cause, is also happy because the cause is also another love, the love of the kingdom of God.”

I: “That's what Christ is saying. And he finally says: ‘Those who can understand this, let them understand it.’ To be able to understand this means to be capable of this devotion. Christ makes it clear that this is not for everyone. Saint Paul also considers that celibacy is better, but it is a gift for the few. And Che stresses that it's for revolutionaries in the vanguard. We Christians also know another thing: that giving up one marriage is for the sake of contracting another marriage, marriage with God (who is love). Christ here speaks of not marrying out of ‘love for the kingdom of heaven.’ And elsewhere he says that the kingdom of heaven is a wedding.”

73.

The Workers in the Vineyard

(Matthew 20:1–16)

The owner of a vineyard made a contract with some workers in the morning for a denarius. Then he went out at different hours of the day to hire more workers telling them that he would pay them whatever was fair. At the end of the day he paid each of them a denarius. Those who started working first were angry.

> *But the owner answered one of them: "My friend, I am doing you no injustice. Did you not agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go away. I want to give the last worker as much as you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my money? Or are you annoyed because I am generous?"*

I: "You who work in the fields, let's see what you think of this parable."

"It seems to me that boss was unfair when he paid them all the same. It's true that he didn't break his agreement. But if he paid, let's say, ten pesos to the ones who didn't work much, he ought to have given extra to the ones who did more work."

"If it was a question of money it would be an injustice, because all the wages he was giving were unfair. He was robbing all of them, because he should have given them the profits, not just the wages. He says he has the right to do what he wants with his money, and that's false, because that money didn't belong to him, it belonged to the workers. But what we're discussing here isn't workers and bosses but the kingdom of God. The vineyard is love. And Jesus says that, with respect to love, the same thing

happens as with a boss who pays equally. That love, God isn't stealing it from anybody, while you could say that the vineyard was stolen. In love it doesn't matter what hour you begin to work, or who produces most, so to speak."

OSCAR: "I don't think the boss was unfair, because he didn't care about the work, or the profits it would bring. What he wanted was for everybody to be working. The ones who began at six earned what was coming to them; the one who began at two worked only one hour, if they stopped at three, but that had nothing to do with those who started at six. The ones who worked more were angry, of course. I can understand them, but they had no right to complain. The boss wanted to get them all together so that none would be idle."

MANUEL: "It wasn't unjust. Because, hell, it's like if a boss says to me: 'Come and work,' and afterwards he sees Felipe and he says to him: 'You come, too,' and Felipe says: 'No, it's too late and I'm going to be earning very little.' And he says to him: 'No, man, why, I'm going to pay you well.' And he goes. He's not taking anything from me, it's a favor that he's doing him."

OLIVIA: "What I see is that the opposite happens there from what happens in real life: that the one that works most earns most. It seems that in that parable Jesus is telling us that in the new society everybody's going to get the same amount."

WILLIAM: "Not according to the work but according to the need."

FELIPE: "Here he's saying that the kingdom of heaven is like a great farm, but a farm on which everybody earns the same so nobody will feel he's more than anybody else; people aren't separated by wages."

BOSCO: "And it seems to me that when you make a revolution, the first ones that work in it shouldn't demand more than the others who join it at the end. Because the revolution is equality. It makes everybody the same."

ESPERANZA, his wife: "And that also means that it's never too late to work in the revolution, right?"

LAUREANO: "Then nobody'll get paid for what they know or what they do, except according to their needs. And everybody has almost the same needs; they have to earn the same."

I: "In the vineyard they've been working for some time, and Jesus tells this parable to the Jews, the ones who went to work first. With Israel began the history of the liberation of humanity. And the Jews believed they were

going to have very special privileges in this kingdom. The fathers of the church have said the Christians were the workers that came afterwards and they were going to receive an equal reward; but Jesus speaks of different hours, and we may believe he also refers to others who came later, at the end, the atheists. There's no difference among the ones who enter at various epochs of history to work for the kingdom. Even though the first ones, says Jesus, are going to be unhappy."

FELIPE: "I see too, Ernesto, that the first ones were promised a denarius. The others were told only that they were going to get a fair wage. So they went to work without expecting the denarius, without knowing if it would be fifty cents (half a denarius) or whatever. So the ones who began to work first for the kingdom, those Jews, were holding to the religious promises that God had given them. There are others who've come later to work without thinking of those promises, thinking they're going to be given just what's fair. But in the end they're all going to receive the same reward of eternal life. But it seems that the first ones complain if these other ones receive the same reward."

So, then, the last shall be first, and the first shall be last.

OLIVIA: "There's a pride among religious people, who think they're the ones that are going to transform the world, the ones that are going to bring to earth this kingdom of heaven; and the Marxists, who don't believe in God, work harder for this kingdom than religious people, without expecting any reward. And Jesus here takes the part of the last ones more than the first ones."

Because many are called, but few are chosen.

OLIVIA: "Lots of people would like to mail money to God in heaven, people who give alms in the temple like people buying insurance, without worrying about whether there's vaccines or medicines or if the people have enough to eat. And there are people who are going to die, who'll never have power, never get a job, they're just going to die; but they know they're going to free a lot of suffering people; and they're up in the mountains without anything; maybe they can't even read, and they're there like Christ suffering for the liberation of their country and of many countries, like Che who liberated one country and went to die in another. And this is what seems to

me real Christianity, and those are the ones that Christ says are the chosen ones."

I said that in Aramaic "many" and "all" are the same, and when Christ says "many" he means "all." He's telling the Jews that all are called but few of them will be chosen. And here there are three judgments that Jesus makes of those religious people, each one stronger than the preceding one, and more radical. They perhaps were said on different occasions but the Evangelist has grouped them into a single text: first he tells them that those who are the last to work will receive the same as they do; then he tells them that the last ones will be ahead of them; then he tells them that few of them will be chosen.

"Is there anything more to add?"

"It's all very clear."

74.

The Curing of a Deaf Mute

(Mark 7:31–37)

Our little church is in a place where the island becomes very narrow, and we have the lake very close to us on both sides. Through the windows on the north side we look out at the lake slightly rippled and a grayish blue in color, and through the windows on the south side the lake is calm and sky blue.

I said the brief mention the Gospel makes of Jesus leaving Tyre and passing through Sidon and the Decapolis and returning to the lake means that he has been abroad, among the pagans, and he's possibly being persecuted and has been in a kind of exile. Part of the lake was occupied by the Decapolis, which were ten pagan tribes, and Jesus may have still been among pagans, and the deaf mute they bring him for the laying on of hands may also have been a pagan.

> *Jesus took him to one side, apart from the people, and he put his fingers in the man's ears and he spat and he touched the man's tongue.*

BOSCO: “It sounds like quackery and witchcraft.”

OSCAR: “What I don't understand is why he took him away from the group, why he did this all alone, separating him from the community.”

DON TANO, from the opposite shore: “We have to decipher everything, right? He's telling us this for some reason. We have to try and understand it.”

OSCAR: “Man, just think: when Jesus performed that miracle when he spat on his tongue, what would people think they were watching? I imagine he must have looked disgusted. He could have performed it some other way, couldn't he? Maybe he wanted to see if they had faith in him, and so he spat. But you know I'm disgusted by somebody else's saliva that drops on me; and to have somebody drip it on my tongue, spit on me, ugh! That would really be disgusting.”

I: “I think Jesus spat on his finger and with his saliva-covered finger he touched the man's tongue.”

RAUL: “But it was the saliva of the man, man!”

OSCAR: “Oh, sure, of course.”

DONALD: “I think maybe Jesus took him aside to give him a special distinction. Maybe people didn't like that boy very much, because they look at deaf mutes like children; they don't take them seriously, don't pay them any attention. And the kids laugh at them. Everybody makes fun of the deaf. They talk to them, and since they don't hear and can't talk, they're useless.”

LAUREANO: “Don't you believe it, those bastards are evil.”

DONALD: “Do you know why they're evil? Because anything people say to them they think they're making fun of them, because they always do. I've seen them calling mutes sons-of-bitches and things like that, since they don't hear. But maybe later somebody says to them, maybe in writing: He called you such-and-such. And then they get mean and then they won't let you talk to them, that's why they don't want anybody to talk to them; they get them all mixed up. And, poor guy, it would be a lot of suffering for him, and then Jesus realizes this and he gives him special attention, taking him off to one side.”

I: “As for what Bosco was saying, that it looked like quackery or witchcraft, maybe there was something of that. In ancient times people believed saliva had magic powers, and people still think so: here they put spit on the bait so the fish will bite better. Maybe Jesus wanted to show the healing power there was in him.”

ALEJANDRO, who is in charge of giving out our medicines: “The Christians later were strongly inclined to a magic mentality, but it may have been a simpler thing, psychological or something like that. In addition to the saliva he may have chewed some root or some other stuff. As for all that magic, I don't agree. The fact is that he was a great leader, and if there's a

great leader, especially in the country or in remote places, he has to do everything, even doctoring. He takes on teaching and everything. It was part of his conscientization work."

I: "They tell Jesus to lay hands on him. In those times that was also to cure. In the rite of extreme unction the priest still lays his hands on the sick person. Our friend the poet and doctor Fernando Silva believes strongly that you have to touch the patient. He also believes you can cure without being a doctor. He has told me that I should touch the sick and that this way I can cure a lot of people. I believe Alejandro practices that, and I've seen that without knowing medicine he makes admirable cures with whatever he prescribes, and people have a lot of faith in him."

Then Jesus looked up to heaven, sighing, and he said: "Ephphatha!" which means "Open."

OLIVIA: "Looking up to heaven was a kind of prayer. He showed us that we must have confidence in the Father."

I: "The heaven of the astronauts was not the heaven of the Jews. For them heaven was a vault set up on columns or foundations and in which the sun moved, and the moon, and the stars. But there was also talk of various heavens or of the heaven of heavens. Heaven was God's dwelling, and also his throne. Jesus tells us about our Father who is in heaven. Matthew instead of using the word 'God' uses the word 'heaven,' and so he says the kingdom of heaven instead of the kingdom of God, and he speaks of having a treasure in heaven instead of a treasure in God. Christ came from heaven, and after his death he went up to heaven and he will come down to judge on the clouds of heaven. Saint Paul speaks of heaven as a city or a community destined for us. In the Apocalypse Saint John says that new heavens and a new earth will be created, and the new society, the new Jerusalem, will come down from heaven. It was at this heaven that Jesus looked and, according to Mark, he was sighing."

NATALIA, the Solentiname midwife: "Maybe it was from distress, because when you have a sick person on your hands, in trouble, you sigh like that. You pretend, and you look again, and you sigh! What wouldn't you give to know more to help the person who's suffering. Just the night before last I had a case like that: a child almost dead. They brought her to me yesterday at dawn. The woman was calling to me, and I could hear the child

screaming. ‘Oh,’ I said, ‘Julio, look out the window, I hear a child crying.’ He said: ‘A light is coming along.’ And I opened the window and stuck my head out, and I saw a man coming with a child all stretched out, and I said: ‘Oh, my God, what's that?’ ‘Doña Natalia, Doña Natalia,’ they called. ‘Here I am. What do you want?’ ‘This poor child is dead and I want you to look at her.’ ‘Well, let's see, and God's will be done.’ You know, I don't know a thing; I never learned anything, either about doctoring or anything else, but everything is in having faith in me: if I do any little thing, maybe just praying to God! So I got up and went out and there she was with the girl all stretched out. ‘Is she alive?’ the man said to me. ‘Yes,’ I told him, ‘Yes she is. Don't you worry. Have faith in God, because I'm going to give her a little something.’ And so I made up some medicine. And after a while the girl began to move. And what I did was nothing but since he had faith maybe in me, and in God, the child recovered. The truth was I didn't want to worry them but I thought the girl was dead. And I sighed and sighed, ‘Oh, my God!’ heartbroken to see a mother there weeping. And that's the way Jesus was sighing, I think.”

IVAN: “And when he said, ‘Open!’ it wasn't only that their ears should open but that they should open themselves to other people.”

BOSCO: “There are some people that have ears but don't hear. All they hear are radios that are nothing but ads and propaganda. They're deaf and so they're dumb.”

OLIVIA: “We can have good ears but they're no good to us if our heart doesn't open up. It's the whole person that he's telling to open up, not just the ears, to sense the reality that he wasn't sensing. And this is what he was coming to do with all of humanity. Our senses, too, have been opened up on these islands and we're aware of injustice, which we didn't use to see.”

FELIPE: “We're ignorant people, simple, humble, many of us are illiterate, without any training for talking, and we were like people really dumb. But now here in the church the people can hear and now they can express themselves too.”

I: “Don't you think that in this community a miracle is being repeated?”

At this moment the ears of the deaf man opened, and his tongue was healed and he could now talk well.

FATHER EDUARDO MEJIA, a friend who is visiting us: “I was here before, about six years ago, and at that time they scarcely dared to sing in church, much less say anything. And I've come back and now I see that this miracle has happened. I am a witness of the great change that has taken place here.”

TOMAS: “We had our ears stopped up. That's good, they must have thought. Because the truth is that those of us who used to come here, we couldn't even remotely say anything. And those of us who began to speak, we didn't know what we were saying. So we began, and we go ahead, our senses opening up more and more, as we hear more and more.”

I: “This must encourage the ones that aren't talking yet.”

TOMAS: “Maybe the ones that don't talk know the most.”

OSCAR: “We must admit, Ernesto, that Jesus Christ has done this: I was a man that maybe had something important to say, and I didn't say it out of fear. But it seems that Jesus Christ performed the miracle and without realizing it he even spat on my tongue so that I could talk without any hesitation and hear what they were saying to me. If I understand and if I talk it seems to me it's because he spat on my tongue and I didn't even realize it. He performed the miracle.”

PANCHO: “But it doesn't mean we all should be talking like parrots in a mango tree.”

FELIPE: “Friend Pancho, don't you think that if we all talked, even though it was only one little word, this meeting would seem livelier?”

PANCHO: “Lively, sure, but we'd be here until six in the afternoon.”

And Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone, but the more he ordered them, the more they told about it.

FELIPE: “I think Jesus said that because of the repression, which was already in existence at that time.”

BOSCO: “Maybe that's why he took him off to one side. He wanted to help the guy, but he didn't want them to know it and to proclaim him the Messiah.”

I: “He wanted to work in the dark, but what he was doing became known and the more he said not to talk about it the more they talked. This was dangerous for him, but he had to take the risk of facing that danger, and that finally brought him to his death.”

And they were much amazed and they said: "He does everything well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb talk."

FELIPE: "It's the poor little people, the common people that go around saying that. They're grateful for what he's done for them."

OLIVIA: "The people that were already aware, that already had their ears open and their tongues loose. They weren't the powerful, because to the powerful the liberation of the people is not a good thing."

MYRIAM, one of Olivia's daughters: "And it seems to me that the people that said Jesus did everything well said it knowing that he was going to end up dying for what he was doing."

TOMAS: "And they also realized that he was coming to change things. They thought, we're not going to have any more sick people, we're not going to have any more deaf or dumb, we're all going to be healthy now. When they saw him die they lost heart. But then they saw him resurrected and everything became the same again. We've realized that he goes on performing miracles."

OSCAR: "Ernesto, well, I don't know. Maybe I've been drinking too much. I feel myself inspired. It seems to me that these people were saying that what he was doing was good, but they had doubts: I can't explain why, but it seems to me that there were still doubts; he might be the Messiah, the liberator, or he might not. But now we have no doubts about who he is, and that he performed these miracles, the ones we're hearing about, the ones we're talking about now."

75.

The Good Shepherd

(John 10:7–16)

I began by saying that in ancient times the kings and political leaders—not the religious leaders—were called “shepherds” or “pastors.” Homer calls the kings “pastors of men.” And so they are called in the Bible; on the other hand, the Bible never calls priests and prophets pastors. The prophet Ezekiel says of the leaders of Israel that they are shepherds who drink the milk, dress in the wool, and eat the fattest sheep. That's why the sheep have been scattered and lost in the hills. Yahweh will take the sheep from their mouths, and he himself will be their shepherd; he will gather them together. “Flock” at that time meant “people.”

> *I tell you truly: I am the door through which the sheep enter. All those who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep paid them no heed.*

GIGI, our Peruvian friend: “Because everybody had a power that they'd taken by force; and they ruled by means of a social class that had imposed itself on the others through a private appropriation of the means of production and through the system of slavery of that time.”

MANUEL: “And those who were going to come after him were going to be thieves and bandits too. He says he's the only one who isn't.”

“And that includes David and Solomon?”

WILLIAM: “If not, he would have made the qualification.”

FELIPE: “He says all governments were thieves, and still are, because their laws are to protect private property: robbery.”

TOMAS: “And they kill, too, because not to give the workers what is due them is like killing, killing little by little, a little every day, it seems to me.”

ALEJO: “And it's clear that, as he says, the people paid no heed to them. If they gave in to them it was by force; they didn't give in out of love, but because they were obliged to.”

FELIPE: “The people weren't for Herod; the people weren't for Caesar; but they *were* for Jesus, the poor people.”

ELVIS: “I'll give another example, the fascist military junta of Chile, which is hated by everybody. The people can't be for them.”

ALEJANDRO: “And if he's saying, ‘All those who came before me,’ it's because he considers himself a political boss, a *leader.”*

I: “Our word ‘lider’ comes from English ‘leader,’ and means ‘guide,’ something very close to ‘shepherd.’ So we can say that this is the Parable of the Good Leader.”

GIGI: “And what a revolutionary that Jesus is, condemning all the previous political systems, saying they were thieves and bandits! According to the ideas of that time those political systems were legal and even of divine origin.”

I: “But what Jesus thinks about the kings is the same as the Bible thought. When Israel wants to be ‘like the other nations’ and have a king, Yahweh speaks to them through the prophet Samuel, telling them that the king will make their sons drive his wagons and cultivate his fields, and will make their daughters hairdressers and cooks and bakers, and will take away from them their vineyards and olive orchards to give them to his officials. But Israel insists on being like the other nations and on having a king. And with the kings it happened just as Samuel had prophesied, even with David, who took Uriah's wife away and ordered him slain, and with Solomon, who had a thousand wives, and it's because every king is a thief and bandit.”

> *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for his sheep; but the one that works only for pay, when he sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and flees, because he is not the shepherd and because the sheep are not his. Then the wolf seizes the sheep and scatters them.*

MANUEL: “Some in the government are getting rich, and others are giving their lives for their brothers and sisters.”

WILLIAM: “And what is the wolf? It seems to me the wolf is exploitation: the one who instead of being a person towards people is a wolf towards people.”

GIGI: “He says the wolf seizes the sheep and scatters them: because exploitation divides people into classes. And the exploitation system in society creates individualism and selfishness, prevents humankind from living in communion.”

TOMAS: “We're all scattered.”

NATALIA: “To live in unity we have to live in equality. Here we've got well-dressed *campesinos*, and it seems to me that we're all equal.”

MANUEL: “The corral is to gather the cattle. And he has come to gather humanity, which was scattered, each one going in a different direction. It seems to me that the corral is his church.”

GIGI: “But that stuff about the bad shepherds can also apply to the religious pastors, not just the politicians, when they enjoy political power together with the politicians and get fat with the sheep.”

“The ruler must be like Jesus, a good shepherd; he must do like (and this will surprise a lot of people), like Fidel Castro has done. I don't know him and I don't know much about him, but I've heard about him some. A lot of people say he's a communist bastard that doesn't believe in God. I don't care if he believes in God. You know what I do care about? That he's aware of things and wants to give love. And to give his body for others, for his people. That's what Christ did, you understand? Now, not just Fidel Castro, but lots of people who have died: I don't need to say their names. You understand, a lot of us understand who are the dead that will always live in our hearts.”

> *I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as my Father knows me and I know my Father. And I give my life for my sheep*.

DONALD: “The good shepherds or the good leaders aren't dictators in offices. They know their people and their people know them.”

OLIVIA: “And Jesus says that just as he knows his people, he knows his Father. It's a single knowledge.”

I: “In the Bible ‘knowledge’ is the same as ‘love.’”

GIGI: “Christ appears as a link between the people and love (and God). And he says the people know him: the people know love through him. ‘They know me’ means they know his message of mutual love. That is, everybody knows that with love they'll live happy, with love the world will be better, without the selfishness and the anti-social forces that have governed them.”

I: “The people know love, as you say. Because if Christ knows the Father, who is love, and the people know Christ, they know love. Christ and the people and love (God) are all the same thing.”

> *I also have other sheep who are not of this fold; I have to bring them also. They will obey me, and there will be a single flock and a single shepherd*.

“Those are probably some sheep that aren't tame, that are wild ones.”

I: “I don't think they're wild; they just aren't from this sheepfold. He says they're his sheep and they're in other folds. It's as if he said: ‘Beside the Christian church that you know, I have other churches.’”

A gentleman from San Carlos: “It seems to me that he's referring to other sects, like the Adventists or Evangelicals, that aren't in the same fold as his church but they're going to be.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that what Jesus cared about was love and not whether or not they belonged to a religious sect. When he says he has others, he's saying he has others that love, that know him and that know love, and he's not thinking that there are others who happen to be praying or singing.”

OLIVIA: “It's all the people who weren't Christian, but still belonged to him because they were good people. He's referring to the good people everywhere.”

WILLIAM: “What has happened in Mao's China—putting an end to hunger, to prostitution, to ignorance, to the frightful misery there used to be, and giving everyone great dignity and enough food, clothing, medicines, education, amusements—that's like another church of Christ, with another name.”

I: “And what he says about a single flock and a single shepherd is that all humanity is going to unite, and there's going to be a single leader, who is Christ: the word of love.”

“All humanity, even the exploiters?”

WILLIAM: “The exploiters are the enemies of humanity, the wolves that can't be with the flock. He says all the sheep are going to be united in a single flock with a single shepherd, but he doesn't say with the wolves.”

FRANCISCO: “The one who's a wolf to others will have to stop being a wolf to be with the sheep; otherwise the Good Shepherd won't allow him in the flock.”

GIGI: “What he said is very revolutionary and it's still revolutionary even now in the twentieth century: that there are many of his people outside the church.”

WILLIAM: “And it's also very revolutionary, what he says, that he'll form a single people with his church and with all the people that don't belong to his church.”

GIGI: “And he's saying it at a time when, for the Jews, everything functioned around religion.”

“He's saying that he's going to unite Christians and Marxists.”

“To make a single revolution.”

GIGI: “And he's also putting an end to nationalism, at a time when the Jews had a religious nationalism or a nationalist religion: telling them that out of all the other nations he's going to make a single people.”

WILLIAM: “As if to say proletarian internationalism.”

GIGI: “How different is this picture of the Good Shepherd that we've been shown here from the little religious pictures: an effeminate Jesus carrying a little lamb on his shoulders.”

OLIVIA: “Those who aren't of his church ‘will obey me,’ he says. And that means they will obey the commandment of love. And that's why humanity is going to be a single flock with a single shepherd because humanity is going to be united by love.”

IVAN: “That single flock and that single king will come when we've established perfect communism.”

I: “A world-wide revolution with a single leader, or a single king as they said at that time.”

76.

The "Wicked Wealth"

(Luke 16:1–15)

Some Managua capitalists have just bought a great stretch of land in Solentiname. They came to see it with a group of friends, and on Sunday some of those people also came to visit our community and attended Mass. On this occasion we also had with us our friend Dionisio, the young Costa Rican communist.

The Gospel for this Sunday was about the dishonest manager. He realizes he's going to be fired from his job and he calls in his master's debtors; the one that owed a hundred barrels of oil got his debt reduced to fifty, and the one that owed five tons of wheat got his debt reduced to four, so that when he was fired he would have friends that would treat him well.

> *And the master praised the bad manager because he had been clever to act like that. For the children of this world are more clever in dealing with one another than the children of light. I recommend that you use wicked wealth to make friends, so that when the wealth is gone there will be people to receive you into the eternal dwellings*.

TOMAS PEÑA: "So it means it's not a sin to rob a rich man if he's about to give you something. That's how it is, right?"

OLIVIA: "That's an example that he gives to tell us we have to give the riches that we have to win friends in the kingdom of heaven. This is a kind of parable. And he means also that the riches of the rich don't really belong to them. They don't have them for long; nobody has them beyond death, so giving them away is like giving away what doesn't belong to you."

OSCAR: “I see it this way: that man, what he was really doing was stealing. He got himself some friends with his master's money and what the master said was that he was a very clever thief. And Jesus tells this parable to the rich to make them see that they are thieves; they're not the real owners, they're the managers of other people's wealth, but they're like that servant that disposed of other people's wealth as if it was their own. And what Jesus says is: be clever thieves, that is, be clever rich people, and the money you've got give it to the poor so you'll be saved.”

JULIO: “He's not saying then like Tomas says that you have to steal to give to the poor; he's saying that rich people's money is stolen money and that stolen money they ought to give to the poor.”

OSCAR: “That's good. Notice that guy did a good thing there: he turned thief on his master but he earned the friendship of other people.”

A lady of the capitalist group: “That man shouldn't have mismanaged the money, and then they wouldn't have fired him and then he would have been even more clever.”

Another capitalist: “If he had stolen only for himself and not for the others and if he'd been saving what he was stealing at the time when they fired him he wouldn't have grieved or had to seek favors from anyone, and so he'd have also been more clever.”

Another member of this group, a cousin of mine, an ex-priest: “This is a parable. And it seems to me that what Christ wanted to do through it was to give a new projection to money. The servant could have kept the hundred barrels and all the wheat, but what he did was to help others. So he shows us that money can also be used to do good to others. Even though that man didn't do it to do good to others but to win friends. So with money you can give alms, and if you share with others you win more friends here on earth; and when you die you'll also have those friendships in heaven, with those people you gave alms to. So you can win heaven with money.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me it's a parable, a way of speaking, that we must understand in accordance with the rest of the Gospel. The Gospel is always against possessing wealth; it has always said it should be shared. Somewhere else it says: ‘If you want to follow me, give away everything you have and then follow me.’ And it seems to me that in this parable he's saying you have to be intelligent, that you don't give alms to get friends, or heaven (a selfish heaven), you give everything away so that everyone together can enjoy the kingdom of heaven.”

FELIPE: “To be received in that brotherly society of love—that's what the kingdom of heaven is.”

OSCAR: “What he did with other people's wealth is what the rich ought to do with their own wealth, give it away.”

LAUREANO: “Well, what they think is their own isn't their own; it's also other people's.”

I: “That's why Jesus, the two times he mentions wealth here, calls it ‘wicked’ (in other translations it's called ‘unjust,’ ‘cursed,’ ‘sinful,’ which is the same thing). And this isn't an adjective to refer only to a certain kind of wealth, as if there were other kinds that were just; it refers to all wealth, because all wealth is unjust, all is stolen.”

MANUEL: “In other words, he's telling the rich that they're all thieves, but as long as they're thieves, then let them be intelligent thieves: let them share the wealth before death takes it away from them.”

FELIPE: “Or the revolution.”

I continued: “And it's interesting what Porfirio Miranda says in his book *Marx and the Bible:* that the Bible often for the word ‘alms’ uses the Hebrew word ‘justice,’ in the sense of doing justice, restoring, returning. That's why Christ also calls all wealth unjust, because it's stolen. You ought to divide it because it isn't yours, it belongs to others. And this is also the thought of all the church fathers. Saint Basil says that the rich are owners of the common wealth because they were the first to seize it. Saint John Chrysostom says that the rich do not enjoy what is theirs but what belongs to others. Saint Jerome says that every rich man is a thief or the heir of a thief.”

> *Those who are honest with little will be honest with much; and those who are not honest with little will not be honest with much either. If, then, with wicked wealth you are not honest who will entrust to you true wealth? And if you are not honest with the wealth of others who is going to give you what belongs to you?*

Another one from the Managua group: “But here he condemns theft, when he speaks of those who do not treat honestly what belongs to others.”

I: “What the Gospel here calls ‘what belongs to others’ is what the rich consider as their property. It says that we won't receive our own (the kingdom of heaven) if we haven't been honest with other people's property.

One is honest with wealth when one doesn't appropriate it for oneself but distributes it among its legitimate owners. In capitalism, robbery is taking private property from someone. In socialism, robbery is wanting to keep as private property what belongs to everyone; and so it is also in the Gospels: that's why Christ calls wealth ‘unjust’ (stolen).”

MARCELINO: “And it also says that if we've not been honest with unjust wealth, we won't be given the true wealth. True wealth is love. If we have stolen wealth, false wealth, and we don't distribute it, we won't get the true wealth, love, because love is received only by people who give. If you're rich in money you're poor in love.”

REBECA, his wife: “And it says if you're not honest with little, you won't be honest with much: little are those riches of the rich; great are the riches of the kingdom, love.”

One of the Managua visitors: “But if we distribute what belongs to others we're not behaving honestly. If we distribute what belongs to others, as if those things belonged to us, we're no longer being so honest.”

I: “The rich people who distribute their riches can't be very honest because the riches aren't theirs; they belong to the people (and in the parable the example given is of a manager who wasn't honest), but they can be intelligent. Because if they do this, they'll be received in the kingdom of heaven. Otherwise it will be the people that will forcibly distribute those riches, and it won't be robbery because they belonged to the people. But this last matter isn't discussed in this parable, it's discussed in other Gospel passages, like that one that says that the Son of Man will come ‘like a thief in the night.’”

A visiting lady: “So according to this there's nothing that belongs to others; everything belongs to everyone, and you have to distribute it all, whether you like it or not?”

My cousin: “That would take away liberty, which is an essential value for Christianity. God has created us free; we can be sinners if we wish, and he will not oblige us by force to be good. And if the rich are obliged by force to distribute their riches, their action would have no merit.”

I: “The freedom that we must take away is the freedom to exploit, the freedom to take away the freedom of others. Just because God made us free, no one is free to make us slaves. As for merit, it is clear that the rich have no merit if they distribute by force: therefore they must do it voluntarily.”

DIONISIO: “Like that manager that distributed what wasn't his. All of it wasn't his, although maybe a part of it was, what he'd produced with his own work. But what catches my attention is this: this parable is for the rich, and Christ doesn't give an example of a rich man but of a manager. It seems to me that it's to show that the rich man is only a manager of money. In the parable the owner of the money also appears. But the owner of the wealth is God, or the people, which is the same thing, but not the rich. And the meaning of the parable, it seems to me, is that the rich mustn't be fools, that the day is coming, and soon, when they'll be stripped, and they'd better be a willing part of the action. It's an invitation to the rich to be revolutionaries. And it seems to me that Christ tells them this, individually, because some of them can change, although as a class they're not going to change. There have been bourgeois revolutionaries, like Engels, an owner of textile factories. The rich must be intelligent like that, being revolutionaries. And the poor must also be intelligent, distributing the expropriated wealth revolutionarily, and not with a bourgeois mentality of private appropriation, of selfishness and of individualism.”

FELIPE: “It shouldn't be that, as this parable also says, the people of darkness are brighter than the people of light.”

DIONISIO: “God created the world (or else the revolution did it, which is the same thing) for everybody. With plants, animals, birds, fish, and all natural resources, for all people. But they sinned by falling into the temptation of selfishness; that was the sinful fruit that they ate, wanting to have things for themselves or for their little group, and they appropriated for themselves what belonged to everybody and private property appeared.”

I: “Dionisio belongs to the Communist Youth in his country, but what he has said is the same thing that the fathers of the church said: that in paradise everything is owned in common and that with sin private property was introduced.”

A young lady from the Managua group, speaking softly: “But there were some people who worked more and obtained more things, while others stood around with arms crossed waiting for things to fall down out of the sky, and that's where the inequalities come from. So what we have to do is all work equally so that we'll all have equally. Let everything belong to everyone, but obtained with the effort of everyone. And let's not want to go without working, without making an effort, waiting for the distribution of the things produced by those who have worked.”

Another of the Managua group: “Then everybody would get rich.”

The young lady, very softly: “But everyone ought to make an effort. If my neighbor was the one that worked himself to death, the one that was lively and intelligent and who profited and could achieve his ambition, and I didn't: then I can't complain.”

DIONISIO, speaking very softly, as Costa Ricans do: “The young lady raises a good point: nobody should be left without work and take advantage of the work of others. That's precisely what shouldn't exist.”

OLIVIA: “The rich person is the one who just directs the work and receives the profits from it; the one who does it is the worker, the *campesino*, the stupid one, the illiterate, the one who doesn't have any education and so is used like an ox. Then it means that the humble people, the poor people, are the ones that create the wealth. It's the mass of the poor, the majority, that has created that wealth enjoyed by a few.”

I: “Of course. All the wealth on earth has been created by the workers. The clothes that we have on were made by workers; the shoes we walk in were made by other workers; the food we eat was produced by workers in the field; the houses we live in, and even the great skyscrapers in the cities, and the highways and the bridges, we owe to the workers. But there are people who have a lot of things without ever having made clothes, without having made a shoe, without having sown a seed, without having laid a brick, without having produced a single thing of value on earth. They consume a lot, because the class that doesn't produce is the class that consumes most; most of the goods are consumed by them, the ones that don't work. In natural history those are called parasites. A parasite is an organism that lives at another's expense, feeding on the substance of the other.”

The young lady from Managua: “But probably that person had an idea and with it created a whole stream of work.”

I: “The parasite also has work, a parasite's work. And exploiters can believe that they also work, and even that they work themselves to death, but it's not productive work; it's the work of extracting the profits from the work of others, the work of making others work. A vampire also has to make an effort, sucking blood.”

DIONISIO: “To come closer to home, I'm going to talk about my family. On my father's side we're dirt poor, but on my mother's side, my grandparents and my uncles and aunts own land and textile factories. And I

look at my cousins (not with resentment, I'm perfectly happy to be what I am), how they go to good schools, and then to Harvard or England, and they've got their good life guaranteed forever, and they've already got an inheritance of factories and estates that get bigger and bigger (they must be well managed). In a textile factory, the INTEX, for example, the workers receive wages of 600 to 900 *colones*. The rent on a tiny house, with only one room, is 400 *colones*. And I see the houses that my uncles and aunts live in. You can imagine the mansions they have. And I say to myself, how is it possible for men and women to work as they work (because they work very hard) and to live as they live, starving to death. Because a family can't live on 600 *colones*; and 600 *colones* is a generous salary, some people pay less. And my cousins have never known what work is; they've never touched a loom, they think that work is seeing to it that people work. That's not work; work is transforming raw material. And it's so obvious that that is exploitation, and my cousins don't know it."

My cousin: "I'm not wholly in agreement with that concept of work. Because the buildings that the workers built also needed a plan."

I: "There is such a thing as intellectual work. But the capitalist that just puts up capital, and doesn't do any work, is exploiting."

A lady from Managua: "The capitalist gentleman who didn't work, who only put up his capital, he also contributed to production, because if he hadn't put up his capital, nothing would have been done."

DIONISIO: "That's true, in this capitalist society, because in it without money nothing gets done. But the point is to find out the origin of the money."

The president of the Managua Chamber of Commerce: "I have visited the Soviet Union and I have seen that there is quite a lot of capitalism there. They have even brought in American companies like the Ford Motor Company and Coca Cola. I suppose that kind of socialism is probably not your goal, that is, the goal of the Gospel."

I: "The goal of the Gospel is the perfect communist society, as Marx defined it: 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs.' That's the society in which the first Christians lived when Christianity still had all its purity, as is told in the Acts of the Apostles: 'All those who had believed were very united and owned everything in common. They would sell their goods and all their property and they would divide the money to each one according to his needs' (Acts 2:44–45)."

A Managua lady, with a certain sarcasm: “We're assuming that we've reached a state of perfection in which we are free of all selfishness.”

I: “That's why Christ came to earth, to establish that society of love, his kingdom. That's why he talks a lot about social life and economy. In this passage he talks to us of wealth: that it must be shared. In the following verse he tells us that ‘one cannot serve God and money.’ It's because God is love, and you can't have love and selfishness at the same time.”

Another of the Managua ladies: “There are some people who carry out more important tasks, because they have better intellectual training, and they should be paid better than those who have an inferior intellectual training. Intellectual work has been better paid for centuries.”

DIONISIO: “Sure, of course. You're right about that. Intellectual work pays better. But the bad thing is that many have no access to intellectual training because of the faulty distribution of the wealth. It seems to me that Nicaraguan illiteracy is enormous, and this results in a great mass of the people being enslaved. And the cause of it is private ownership of the means of production, which creates that difference among human beings.”

Another visitor from Managua: “Perhaps it could be said that according to the Gospel the revolutionary is the child of light. But it seems that the Gospel is advising the revolutionaries to adopt the very methods of the capitalists, to be as clever as the exploiters.”

I: “Just as they are diligent toward money, we must be diligent toward love. Just as they are efficient in exploitation, we must be efficient in distributing goods fraternally. Christ calls some men children of darkness, others, children of light. The whole universe has been formed from light, or from energy, which is the same thing. And the darkness is the same as the void. The children of the light are those who are in the line of the evolution of the universe, those who are continuing the process of creation, the supporters of life, in short: those who love. The children of the shadows are those of anti-evolution, the reactionaries, the supporters of death, those who do not love. The love that they devote to money, we must devote to God (or other people, which is the same thing), because as it says in the following verse: You cannot serve two masters, God and money. We commented on this verse in another Gospel passage, and besides, after all we have said here, it doesn't need any commentary.”

You brag of being just in people's eyes, but God knows your hearts. And what people consider to be great, God abhors.

I: “What people ‘consider to be great’ is all power, all domination, all authority, which God abhors because he is the spirit of revolution. He is against all control of some people by others. And private ownership of the means of production, as Dionisio says, or of wealth, as the Gospel says, is the reason why some people control others.”

CESAR: “And the rich person who sees a change coming in the world (and you see it coming if you read the Gospels) and doesn't take steps to be admitted into the just society that's going to come, into the new humanity that's not going to die (which is what eternal dwelling places means), that person is acting like an idiot.”

77.

The Kingdom of Heaven and Violence

(Matthew 11:12–19 and Luke 16:16–17)

From the time of the coming of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and those who use force try to seize the kingdom.

I said that at first I hadn't wanted us to comment on this verse because it seemed to me that you couldn't comment on it. The specialists in the Scriptures say it's impossible to know what Jesus meant, because the Greek wording is ambiguous, and if we don't know what Jesus meant by the violence of the kingdom of heaven, then how are we going to comment on it? That's why, when we commented some time ago on the passage about the envoys of John the Baptist, we got only to the verse just before this one. They say this is the most obscure verse in the whole Bible. Specialists say that in the Greek phrase you can't tell if the verb is active or passive, if the kingdom of heaven creates violence, or suffers violence, or even if violence is to be taken as good or evil. There are some who say (and this has been the traditional interpretation) that to conquer the kingdom of heaven you must do violence to yourself; but why this is so only since the coming of John the Baptist is not explained by this interpretation. Others say it means the kingdom of heaven is violent because it erupts with force, and because it comes to destroy the existing order. Others say it means that since the coming of John the Baptist a violence has been unloosed against the kingdom of heaven, the violence of the persecutors. Others say it means that, since the coming of John the Baptist, the zealots, the ones belonging to the army of armed struggle, were being converted to the new movement of

the kingdom of heaven, as in the case of Peter and other disciples who were zealots. And others say it means that the zealots, the guerrilla fighters, mistakenly wanted to establish the kingdom of heaven by force of arms. Which interpretation are we left with? Are we going to choose arbitrarily the one we prefer? It's hard to comment when we don't know exactly what it means. But at any rate, I now wanted to see if we can comment on it.

There was a long silence. I read the verse again, slowly, so that we could reflect. I then continued:

“It seems to me that the idea that the violent ones that conquer the kingdom are the ones that do violence to themselves by means of asceticism, with sacrifices, penitence, and fasting, doing violence to their natures in every way, that idea we should reject. It has been the traditional interpretation for many centuries, but Jesus didn't talk about such things. Instead, right here, a few verses later, Jesus contrasts the lifestyle of John the Baptist (who ‘neither ate nor drank’) with his own life style (who ‘eats and drinks, and you say he's a glutton and a drunkard’). That's the individualistic and purely spiritualistic interpretation of people who don't want to interpret the Gospel politically. It seems to me that he must be talking about political violence: either the political violence of the kingdom of heaven or that of the guerrilla fighters, who in one way or another want to enter the kingdom, with arms or by laying down arms, or the violence of the enemies of the kingdom of heaven: Herod, the Sanhedrin, the Romans.”

We had with us our friend the poet ANTIDIO CABAL, who had come from Venezuela. He was the father of Dionisio, who had been here before, and the husband of the poet Mayra Jimenez. He said, speaking slowly: “Well, sticking strictly to the text, I'd say there was a reaction against the kingdom of heaven from the moment when John the Baptist appears.”

I interrupted: “He was in prison, and they were soon going to slaughter him.”

ANTIDIO: “That's why: it means that John the Baptist brought something new with respect to the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom was accepted up until he arrived, it seems. When he arrived, something new was introduced. This newness will be the antagonism it produced in the authorities. It seems that what John said or did wasn't agreeable to the men who in some way governed relations with God. Now, well I'm not sure about this, about what I'm going to say, because the text isn't clear either in one sense or in the other. It could be understood, or maybe not, that they're talking about two

kinds of violence. He says: ‘Up to now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence’; and later he says: ‘Those who use force try to seize it.’ It seems that it is a question of two violences, the violence brought by John, who understands the kingdom of heaven in a way different from how it was formerly understood; and the violence of people who have power, the power of arms and money, that is, authority, and who are opposed to the renewal that John the Baptist brings. This is another possible interpretation. The two times that you've read the text, explaining it right away, it's seemed to me that you identify the first, ‘violence,’ with the second, ‘force.’ It could be, or maybe it couldn't be.”

I: “That's what I was doing just now. Probably Christ left it ambiguous because he wanted to, and he wanted to talk about the two violences. Only a moment ago I was thinking why it is, as some say that this text hasn't been understood down through the centuries. Up to now we haven't found anything in the Bible that we've failed to understand. Maybe he wanted to introduce it like that, mysteriously, so we'd discuss it as we're discussing it today and so we'd keep in mind the violence of liberation and that of the oppressors. He must be talking, as Antidio says, about the two violences.”

ANTIDIO: “It seems that Jesus is talking here about violence and force. There's the *violence* of people who want to change what is evil, and the *force* of the establishment that tries to prevent things from changing.”

I: “It may be appropriate to say here what I read in the commentary of a Scripture scholar: the word ‘to seize’ that is used here in Greek has a meaning applied especially to spoils of war. It's to make off with the spoils; it's to seize, rob, grab in order to distribute. And that's what they want to do, ‘the ones who use force’ with the kingdom of heaven.”

ANTIDIO: “What follows might clarify things a little, up to a certain point.”

> *All the prophets and the law of Moses spoke of the kingdom until John came*.

ANTIDIO, clearly and slowly: “The prophets and the law of Moses spoke of the kingdom…until John came. From then on, force tries to prevent the establishment of the kingdom. There are two different situations with respect to the kingdom: from the prophets and Moses until John appears, and from John on.”

MAYRA, Antidio's wife: “It occurs to me, Ernesto, that perhaps John brings a new concept of the kingdom of heaven (a kingdom of heaven that is the bringing about of perfect equality and justice on earth) and that necessarily creates violence: a violence in the first place within ourselves, and an external violence that wants to take possession of heaven and snatch heaven from us like a prize of war.”

I: “ ‘The prophets and the law of Moses’ in the time of Jesus meant what we now understand by the Old Testament. Jesus is saying that the prophetic books and the five books of the Pentateuch attributed to Moses (the whole Bible) *talked* of the kingdom: they announced it as a future kingdom. Until John. From then on, the kingdom has been a reality. Jesus didn't come to change anything about the law and the prophets; he says somewhere else that he does not come to change the law but to carry it out. This is the law of the Bible, which is none other than the law of love. The revolutionary Bible writer Jose Porfirio Miranda makes it clear that Jesus didn't bring any new message. He said absolutely nothing new, nothing different from what the prophets said. For the prophets and Jesus the kingdom is the same one: a just, perfect society: communism on earth. The difference is that the prophets were announcing the future kingdom, and Jesus says that it has already arrived; that is his new tidings. And the new tidings of John, the precursor, who said that the kingdom was ‘near.’”

JULIO CASTILLA, a worker from Juigalpa: “John told them something really screwy: now is the hour for change.”

I: “He told them: ‘Now is the revolution.’ And that's why since John came violence came. Earlier, when they talked about the kingdom, there was no conflict. They talked about a future society. Now we must expropriate private property and all that, and now comes violence. The violence that we ourselves must make, and the external violence, as Mayra says.”

ANTIDIO: “This is an example that I want to give now, because earlier I was talking conceptually. It's what we've seen in Cuba. I was saying that violence is the violence of the guerrilla fighters, and the force is the force of the government that wants things to continue as they are, in opposition to the changes that the guerrilla fighters want to make. We could also say that violence is a kind of force that wants to change an unjust situation, while force is a kind of violence that doesn't want an unjust situation to change. The first represents the renewers, and a contemporary figure is Fidel Castro;

it's constructive, positive violence, and the violence of justice, that exists only because of the existence of the force that is the violence of injustice. It's what is happening right now. The kingdom of heaven has to adapt now to this new historical situation: justice conquered by violence, in accordance with this text. So we're referring, with this language, to a current political and social situation, right now, which exists in many countries in the Americas and in other parts of the world, but which comes from John the Baptist."

I: "Christ was talking of the kingdom of heaven as something that was soon going to be established. I've often asked myself why it hasn't yet been established. It seems to me that it's because he came in the midst of a slave society, and before the establishment of the kingdom, humanity has to pass through several stages. If he had come now, the kingdom, that society, would come into being quickly. But if he hadn't come at that time we wouldn't have the social progress we now have. He had to come in the midst of a slave society, and die crucified in that society. And thanks to him the kingdom of heaven has come close to us. Martí said that humanity has climbed half of Jacob's ladder. And since Martí it's advanced even more. Especially in Cuba. I believe this has been much clarified for us by what Antidio has said, that it's no longer as obscure as the Bible scholars said it was, and that we can comment on it."

ESPERANZA: "Ernesto, I see that what Christ says began to exist with John the Baptist is the same thing that has begun to exist with us with the Gospel. We had religion, a lot of religion throughout the country, but it didn't mean a thing. Only now, when we're beginning to discover the Gospel in all its passages, does it have to bring violence because of course it goes against the rich. So it's something violent because the rich are not about to let their things be taken from them. So each part of the Gospel brings violence, which we have to create, then, even if we don't want it."

I: "What Esperanza says is as clear as a bell. At first the Gospel didn't bring any danger; they even thought that the kingdom of heaven was the sky. But with John and Christ, of course, violence already begins, revolutionary violence, and counterrevolutionary violence."

OLIVIA: "And you could also say: the violence of love and the violence of injustice, those are the two violences. Because there is a just violence, a violence of love that wants to put an end to injustice with the Gospel, with love among people."

I: “So what Christ is saying is that the prophets talked about the kingdom, but that's all they did, just talked. Now is the time for action. Now there is revolution and repression.”

OLIVIA: “But revolutionary violence exists to put an end once and for all to all violence and to bring love into being.”

I: “If the violent were the ascetics, those who do violence to themselves, it's hard to understand how they can seize the kingdom of heaven, since the kingdom of heaven isn't heaven the way we used to think about it; it's a perfect society. How can good people, saints, want to seize a society and appropriate it for themselves? But if the kingdom of heaven is a society, as we know it is, it certainly *is* clear that those who use force do want to take it away from us.”

ANTIDIO: “I'm going to add something. I've been rereading this text, and it makes it very clear that the coming of the kingdom of heaven isn't once and for all but something that gradually gets done, and this kind of violence assumes that it's something hard to achieve. And when it says that those who use force try to conquer it, I start thinking that Christianity has been conquered by that force for two thousand years, not counting the two or three hundred years of primitive Christianity. This kingdom that they're trying to build was blocked by the people who had the force, who were rulers of the world (of weapons, of money, and of culture). They have opposed Christ's plan to establish justice. Injustice was perpetuated. You could say they snatched the kingdom and they've kept it snatched for seventeen hundred years, that kingdom of heaven. That kingdom would have already come if we humans had wanted it.”

JULIO: “The kingdom of heaven is perfect communism.”

IVAN: “And John's role was to be the precursor of that society.”

> *And if you are willing to believe it, John is the prophet Elijah, who was destined to come. Those who have ears, let them listen*.

I: “For the Jews, the cycle of the prophets had already ended. There couldn't be any more prophets than those of the biblical canon. But it was also believed that the prophet Elijah, who according to legend had not died but had been swept up in a chariot of fire, would return to earth before the Messiah came. That was the last word of Malachi, the last of the prophets according to the biblical canon. At the time of Christ there was what we

may call a great devotion for Elijah, the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, a prophet and a martyr. They were expecting him. According to the scribes Jesus couldn't be the Messiah because Elijah hadn't returned. Jesus answered that line of thought by saying that the prophet Elijah had already arrived in the person of John the Baptist (who was not a new prophet because there couldn't be any more prophets; the hour of the kingdom had come). But he specified: 'If you *are willing* to believe it, John is the prophet Elijah.' He was Elijah only on the condition that they accepted him. According to Malachi, Elijah was going to come to reconcile humanity. Today we'd say to put an end to class distinctions. Later, when they'd already killed John the Baptist, Jesus said: 'It is true that Elijah is coming first, and that he will arrange everything. But I say to you that Elijah already came and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they wanted.' Here Jesus adds that anyone with ears should listen, and this also means that it depends on them whether John is Elijah. I've also read that 'those who have ears, let them listen' was a Jewish refrain that was repeated when an obscure ruling was being put forward."

FELIPE: "That means those who are aware."

OSCAR: "It means we shouldn't be stupid, man."

JULIO: "It means that Elijah has to keep coming. Marx too could have been another Elijah, if we're willing to believe."

I: "Those who are in favor of change, then, those who are ready to accept this, they accept it. The others are going to be left in ignorance. And afterwards they'll say that nobody knew what Christ meant, that it won't be known down through the centuries."

OSCAR: "I think it also means we shouldn't be stupid, because we shouldn't let ourselves be robbed. But we're so stupid that we stand there with our arms crossed, and we pretend to be deaf, and we don't fight. We want a kingdom without a struggle. But there we have to struggle. That's violence. Knock down anybody that's screwing us, anybody that tries to rob us."

ESPERANZA: "But you can understand that only through the Gospel. Because think of all the people that are born with nothing, and so they say: 'What the hell can they steal from me, I've got nothing to steal.' And maybe they're working on a hacienda, and they don't even know they're getting robbed."

JULIO: "That's why you've got to have ears."

FELIPE: “And then there's guys that don't have shit and they say: ‘Oh, communism! It takes everything you've got.’”

ESPERANZA: “You've got to have ears and understand what these Gospel words mean.”

OLIVIA: “It seems we have a real responsibility to love. It's not just hearing, but, like Esperanza says, we've got to understand, too. We can't say afterwards: ‘I didn't understand.’ Jesus tells us we have that obligation, ‘guys that have ears ought to listen.’ Because if we don't we're not caring about others, and that's committing a crime.”

I: “There are people here in Solentiname that don't even have ears, and they never come here to listen.”

ESPERANZA: “That's why you have to understand. This isn't for everybody. You have to understand is what he means.”

I: “And Jesus saw that they weren't listening to him. His words were having no effect. And that's why he goes on to say”:

> *With what can I compare the people of these times? They are like children who sit down to play in the parks and they shout to their companions: “We played the flute for you but you didn't dance. We sang sad songs for you but you didn't weep.”*

I: “Jesus makes a very nice comparison: children who don't want to play anything. Their companions suggest that they play ‘wedding,’ but they don't want to. They suggest that they play ‘funeral,’ but they don't want to. Everything bores them. Maybe Jesus was remembering the games of his childhood. People are like those children that won't get into the game. That's why there's no kingdom. And Jesus explains what those two kinds of games were”:

> *Because John came, who neither ate or drank, and you say he has an evil spirit. Then came the Son of Man, who eats and drinks, and you say he is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of sinners and tax collectors. But wisdom is shown in its works*.

OSCAR: “It's good to have Jesus say he drinks. If you didn't have fun, you'd really be screwed.”

I: “There were two ways of presenting the kingdom, John's way and his way. John led a life of fasting and prayer, and they said he was possessed of

the devil, which at that time was like saying he was crazy. Jesus led a normal life and even went to parties, but they rejected him just the same."

OSCAR: "The same thing happened to John and to Christ. They killed them both. And nowadays it's the same. You have to suffer. To be able to triumph you also have to die. But what good to us is a body that all it can do is move and not do anything useful. Jesus there was referring to the exploiters who didn't care a damned thing about other people…. Oh, I can't go on. My tongue's confused. Let somebody else talk. I'm a fool."

NATALIA: "John used to pray, maybe so people would accept the kingdom, but they didn't listen to him. He went on praying. They asked him if he was the Messiah, and he said: 'He'll be coming soon.'"

I: "The trouble is that John also spoke up against exploitation. He attacked Herod and the ruling classes. John was a great religious figure. He created a religious movement. But that didn't make them accept him, because he was a revolutionary. Without that, they would have accepted the long prayers and the fasting. And so if we had a Christianity with lots of religious devotions, but also revolutionary, they wouldn't accept it. And a Christianity without religious devotion or ritual, but revolutionary, they won't accept that from us either."

FELIPE: "I see one thing: the people have no reason to be afraid of revolutions. I can see why people who weren't poor were against John and Jesus, because neither of them talked in favor of the rich, just the opposite. They preached Christianity, the liberation of the poor."

I: "But I believe Jesus sees that he's ignored not only by the rich but also by the poor, who were influenced by the ideology of their leaders. Jesus here is talking about people in general, without distinction: 'What can I compare people of these times to?'"

ANTIDIO: "I wanted to say something about that, with regard to what Natalia said and what Felipe has just said: one of the biggest problems in any revolution isn't the rich at all; it's the poor people. They've taken everything away from the poor. And among the things they've taken away is the sense to understand their situation, or, using the Gospel words, they've taken away their ears. They've taken from them the knowledge that in them lies the force of the revolution. A very frequent problem among workers, laborers, and *campesinos* is that the poorer they are the less chance they have to realize that they're poor. When they take away from them everything that's the substance of living, they take from them even the sense

of life. They can't understand anything because they've taken away even their understanding."

FELIPE: "They listen to the National Radio and they believe whatever they're told on it."

ANTIDIO: "They think like the rich, and that's their tragedy, because they're not rich. The rich have tricked the poor, making them think, feel, and react as if they were rich. The poor have no culture. What is meant by culture means in practice to be a complete human being. [I noticed that many people had tears in their eyes.] We can't be complete if we don't eat right, if we don't take care of our health, and if we don't get an education. People who don't eat right and don't take care of their bodies and can't get an education, they don't understand life. They don't know what life consists of. And they even believe they don't deserve it. The poor people that don't come here, I'd say, giving it a lot of thought, that it's not that they don't want to hear. The horrible thing is that they're not able to hear. It's only through a particular violent reality that they're able to hear. There are two kinds of poor people. The less poor are the ones that want to hear and can hear. They still have their ears, and they're the ones that help to make the revolution. The ones that can't hear, they never do hear, until the revolution comes and tells them: here's your food, here's your doctor, here's your school, here's your house, here's your job, here's your whole life. That's what happened in Cuba, as Ernesto tells in his book [*In Cuba* (New Directions, 1974)]. The ones that made the revolution were just a few people, helped by the bourgeoisie from the city and by a small part (though a very decisive and very important part) of the *campesinos*. But the revolution survives, not thanks to the ones that managed to make it succeed but to the ones that couldn't hear, but later, when the revolution came, they saw it and determined to defend it at all costs. And that's why there's a revolution. Fidel came down from the Sierra and made it succeed, with the help of the ones that had been able to hear. But Fidel has kept it going with people who hadn't helped him to make it; they heard only later when they saw it and they've been able to defend it: and that's the whole Cuban people. But the Cuban people didn't make the revolution; it was made by the part of the people that could hear. And the ones that couldn't hear because they didn't have ears, they got ears when the revolution won and they saw the deeds, they saw the reality. It was different from the reality that the rich, the ruling class, had told them was reality. They saw another reality, they joined the

revolution, they became the revolution. So the revolution has two stages, the Cuban and any other one. It was begun first by the ones that could hear. Later it was kept going and made to grow by the ones that hadn't been able to hear because their ears had been taken away (and the revolution gave them back their ears, gave them back their awareness, their thought). And notice: they begin to think and be aware and hear from the moment when they eat, from the moment when they get taken care of. Because when people are eating right and don't have a bleeding mouth or their kids with stomachs and intestines all swollen, they have time to think. And when the people recover their thought, they realize that it's the people that make history, it's the people that do things and keep things going, it's the people that are the whole truth, which has been returned to them by the revolution. Then the people make the revolution grow, becoming part of it and prolonging it."

I: "And that is also a commentary on the last sentence that Jesus spoke: 'Wisdom is shown in its works.' Wisdom is the wisdom of God. Out of respect, Matthew doesn't mention the word 'God.' It's the plan that God has conceived with respect to the universe, or we might say it's the whole great cosmic process of evolution. As for the 'works of God,' they have a very precise meaning in the Bible. They are God's works of liberation, ransoming his people from those who oppress them. Jesus also talks of the works of his Father, and he says that those are the works that he does, which is like saying that he is making his Father's revolution. They didn't accept John and they don't accept him, he says here, but wisdom, or God's cosmic plan, is shown through revolutionary action. We might say through its results. Not through words or ideology but through works. Antidio has already mentioned those works: food for everybody, medical services, education, etc. The good works that have been done in Cuba. These have been traditionally called works for charity, and we would better translate them as works of love."

I later said that we must also comment here on a passage of Luke in which he also talks of the kingdom of heaven and violence, but many think its meaning is different from Matthew's, and others think it's even opposed. Everyone agrees that it's also an obscure passage. It's Luke 16:16–17. Johnny, a boy often who is near me, offers to read it aloud. He stands up and reads:

Up until the time of John the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets were in effect. Since then the good news of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed and everyone is struggling to get in. It is easier for heaven and earth to cease to exist than for a single letter of the law not to be fulfilled.

I said that according to the Scripture scholars the meaning is also that all try to get in by force, forcing their way in.

BOSCO: "The twenty centuries that have passed since John are nothing compared with the enormous number of centuries that humanity has had. And in these twenty centuries history has accelerated a lot, and is accelerating more and more. And besides, we now know which way history is going, and we can begin to steer it ourselves."

FELIPE: "It seems to me that it used to be that people understood the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets but they didn't follow them; they were useless."

I: "The law was to love your neighbor like yourself, and also that the people of Israel ought to remain free, and that there should be no slavery among them, and no poverty, and this was also the teaching of the prophets. But they couldn't put all this into practice, even though the law and the teaching were very clear, as Felipe says."

IVAN: " 'Since then the good news has been proclaimed' means there's going to be a radical change. A new society's coming. It means a lot."

NATALIA: "For me the good news is that we're all going to be free."

I: "It's good news for the poor; if it's good for the poor it must be bad for the rich."

MYRIAM: "As I see it the ones that are struggling to get in are the ones that already want to change."

I: "But he says *all."*

MYRIAM: "Maybe it's all the poor."

BOSCO: "Maybe there are some selfish bastards that are trying to get in."

JUAN, the seven-year-old son of Teresita and William: "To make people scared."

I: "To make people scared. For example, Pinochet and others like him. They also talk of creating a perfect society."

BOSCO: "It seems to me that all that about everybody struggling to get in will be when they're screwed, when they don't have their Miami anymore

and they have nowhere to go. Everybody'll want to get into the revolution, when the revolution's world wide."

TERESITA: "Not everybody's going to get into the revolution."

I: "Here it only says that everybody *wants* to."

TERESITA: "Then, when there's no more Miami, I don't know what they're going to do."

BOSCO: "The way I figure it: when they don't have their Miami or anywhere to go, those bastards have got to get in or try to get in by force."

I: "What it says here is that ever since John the Baptist everyone has been trying or struggling to get in."

ELVIS: "Like Somoza saying his government is revolutionary."

JOHNNY, the ten-year old, in a soft voice: "I heard him."

JUAN, the seven-year-old, who is next to Johnny, in a loud voice: "Johnny says he heard him."

I: "I believe that here 'everyone' refers to revolutionaries and fascists. Jesus says that everyone wants to get in, not that everyone is going to get in. If they ask Pinochet if he wants a just society, he'll say yes, and that he's creating one, that he's establishing the kingdom of heaven." (Johnny, Juan, and other children with them think this is very funny.)

JUAN: "He's doing a lot of evil."

I: "Nevertheless he's doing a lot of evil, as Juan says. We've now understood this bit about everyone struggling, which seemed confused before. Afterwards Christ says that heaven and earth can cease to exist, but that not a single letter of the law will fail to be fulfilled. He really doesn't say 'letter' but something smaller, a tilde or a kind of accent over certain Hebrew letters."

BOSCO: "It seems to me it's like saying the laws of Marxism have to be fulfilled, and that history is going inevitably toward communism. It will be easier to destroy the earth than for those laws not to be fulfilled."

I: "And that's a lovely thought."

BOSCO: "That part's very encouraging."

ELVIS: "It's a process that can't be stopped. And Allende said a lovely thing: 'History is ours, and the people are making it.'"

I: "What Allende is saying is the same thing that Christ is saying. This is very beautiful, because the law of the Bible was the law of a perfect society. There are many who believe that there will never be on earth a society in which everyone loves one another, in which there is no injustice or

selfishness, no grief or weeping, even though the Apocalypse says that all tears will be wiped away."

BOSCO: "Somoza has just said in a speech that there's got to be rich and poor, because if there's no rich who's going to help the poor? [The children laugh again.] And he said 'If nobody is the owner of the land, who is going to give work to the *campesinos*?'"

TERESITA: "It's through ignorance that they don't know where history is going. Poor people don't know that. In Cuba everybody studies Marxism, and they know the law has to be fulfilled; history always advances."

JUAN: "Without the rich the poor would live well.''

I: "What Juan says is quite right, the opposite of what Somoza says. Somoza says the poor would be very badly off without the rich, but it's just the opposite, isn't it, Juan?"

ALEJANDRO: "I think that just as Antidio a while ago gave Cuba as an example, we can also give Solentiname. You all know that this group that meets here is criticized a lot by those who stay at home. They say that here there are no prayers, no saints. But they don't pray at home. Or that we smoke inside the church, or because after Mass we have a drink under the mango trees. They also drink (and get drunk) in their houses. And it's not that I want us to be praising ourselves, but I believe that good works are done here, works of wisdom, I could name a few, but there's no need."

ANTIDIO: "I'm in a position to say, because I'm from Venezuela, that this group that's commenting on the Gospel has an influence on other Christians and on other Marxists outside of Nicaragua. The ones that stay at home, the most they'll do is take a few drinks at home, and I don't think drinks at home are any holier than drinks in church. This group is influencing revolutionary thought (to speak only of what I know directly, but I could tell you much more) in the Christians and Marxists of Venezuela. This is true to such an extent that, for example, there's a very important Catholic in Venezuela and, when it was said there that Ernesto was having some problems in Nicaragua and that maybe he was going to decide to give up his work here, this guy said to me very seriously: 'Well, you tell Ernesto and his people in Solentiname, you write to them, that they don't belong just to Nicaragua, that they belong to us, too, that they must think of us, that thanks to them we've settled a series of things that were very serious and we've cleared up a lot of questions.' So the ones that stay home there, all they do is stay home and they can't make their voices heard or have an

influence on the rest of the countries of America or on other countries in other parts of the world. Because you must know that what is said here is translated into several languages. What has come out of here is very important. I insist again and I repeat: there are Christians and Marxists that say that what happens in Solentiname is like a laboratory for America. I say this not so you'll feel very important but so you'll feel very much needed. I also want to say one thing about the poor, to finish. The poor are (among many other things that I could spend all morning listing) the workers, the ones who build the roads, the highways, and the trucks, too. They fish, they sow cotton, coffee, therefore they are the *makers:* they make the roads, they make the cotton, they make the coffee, they make the trucks, they make everything. Therefore they're the ones that make the world. So we come to the following: they make things, and once they make them (and they're always making them), the things aren't for them. They're taken away from them. Then the poor are the ones that make the world but they can't enjoy the world. The world is enjoyed by the ones that don't make it, the ruling class, the rich. That's in the first place. In the second place, as the poor are so busy working and making things, they have no time to think. They're poor, they own nothing, all they have is *work*. That's all they have. They're animals that get wages so they can recover the physical strength they used in working, so they can go back to work the next day, the next week, the next month, the next year. Or they're like machines, like a boat motor that needs gasoline or whatever you call it here to go on functioning as a boat motor, but all its life it will be just a boat motor. They go filling the laborer with gasoline, which is the few coins they give him for rice and beans and a tortilla, so he won't starve to death and go on being a useful object producing for others but not for himself. And a man that spends all day producing for others and eating and sleeping just to build up his strength and go on again just the same way the next day, a man like that, he can't think about what I've been saying, that he makes the world and that he's changing it. That's why history has needed Christ, Marx, people who aren't poor. They belong to the ruling class but they're traitors to it (and the word ‘treason’ sounds very well here). They're turncoats, that is, they abandon their class because they feel ashamed to belong to a ruling class. [I interrupted Antidio to tell him that Christ didn't belong to the ruling class.] No, he didn't but he was God, so I've put him in the same category. These people of the ruling class were aware that the poor make the world, that

they're transforming it. They are the theoreticians, the intellectuals. Marx was no laborer. Engels was no laborer. They were aware that the wisdom of the world was produced by the poor. They took this wisdom and they wrote the books that are revolutionizing the world. That brings us to the following: It's necessary for the poor, for the workers of the world, to become conscious of what they are doing unconsciously. They are told this by those who abandon the ruling class. They tell them that they have a great culture. They tell the poor: you're the ones that are making all this, you're the owners of all this. We awaken your consciousness, we give you back your ears so you can rise up and take possession of all that is yours and take away from the rich what is not rightly theirs, and you recover it not just for yourselves but for all of humanity. The rich are a class that have decided that they alone are all of humanity. Whereas now, what is demanded of the poor and the workers is that they work for humanity, and even for the rich, because the rich are perhaps the poorest of all. They're not even people, they're nothing but *rich* people. So the poor have two obligations: in the first place, instead of being poor people, become people, recover all that's been taken from them, and at the same time take away from the rich what they have so that the rich, once they've lost what they have, can become people. So the work of the revolution done by the workers consists of making people of all of us who aren't people, and none of us are, we're either poor or rich, not people. And that's the great responsibility of the working class, in the country or in the city, people like you. It's not a question of persecuting the rich guy or even jailing him. We have to be sorry for those poor guys; of course, now's not the time to be sorry, that's for later. Later we'll have to feed them and send them to the hospital and educate them, re-educate them."

NATALIA: "They've become rich through the poor, because that's why they're rich, through the poor, who've given them their riches."

ANTIDIO: "They're bandits, and every bandit, especially at that rank, is not a person. Being a person is something they don't know anything about."

ALEJANDRO: "Che's new human being. That's what a person is."

ANTIDIO: "And I repeat that those who live in Solentiname mustn't feel that they belong only to Solentiname or to Nicaragua. They also belong to Christian and non-Christian political leaders in Venezuela and beyond. In Venezuela there's finally come a union of Christians and Marxists, who deep down (and on the surface, too) want the same thing. And there's

nothing now that can separate them. This is so true that what is said here in this church is important to the communists because they feel that this is their affair, too. So there's no need to be separated now. The only thing that separates people is that some are rich and others are poor, some are exploiters and others are exploited."

NATALIA: "We really think the same as them, and so we're united, you might say, to their words."

ANTIDIO: "Well, the importance of Solentiname consists of what is said here, which is very good, and this is not the opinion of people with fake culture, which means almost all professors (I'm a professor, so I know what I'm talking about; it's a fake culture, right?) and because besides, what's said here comes from reality itself. It's not something dreamed or thought, and it comes from people like you, working people who at the same time have had the opportunity to think."

I: "It's very important for the poor to comment on the Gospels, which were also written by poor people, by fishermen. The Gospels with comments by the rich are very different. It's like the Gospels that used to be preached here, a Gospel interpreted according to the ideology of the ruling class. It began by stating that there couldn't possibly be a kingdom of God on earth. The kingdom of heaven was going to be only in heaven. On earth there would always be injustice, always rich and poor. And therefore neither Christ nor John the Baptist came to do anything on earth, as far as transforming it goes. We must continue with the prophets, *talking* about the kingdom of God, but not *doing* anything about it."

ADAN: "That means that 'he came to die to save us.'"

I: "But without changing the world."

ANTIDIO: "And the truth is that the ruling class, the rich, not only allow people, but they like people to say things, even things against them, so they can appear to be generous. What they never allow (they kill you first) is to do things against them. That's serious. But there are words that are deeds, like the words that occur here in this church. It's showing the way. It's not talk, it's action. The fact that the Gospel has to be read another way, interpreted another way, and that that other way moves you to action, not to dream or be resigned, not like the reactionary Gospel that, when I was sixteen or seventeen, I heard preached by my parish priest in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, producing interpretations like this one: mothers shouldn't let their daughters ride bicycles because that makes them expose their legs."

I: “And because the Gospel isn't intended for discussion but for action. Christ says that wisdom is shown by its works. The Gospel is shown by its works, doing what has been done in Cuba.”

OLIVIA: “I'd say just as it's happening here in Solentiname. There are people who say there's nothing religious here, that Ernesto has nothing at all religious about him. Then I say to them: if you don't see the works.”

OSCAR: “They're just bastards.”

NATALIA: “Stupid people. You remember, Olivia, when this church was full of saints and nobody came, and that time there was going to be a Mass. We had to open a path with machetes, beginning at four in the morning, so people could get in, all thickets it was, and inside there were the saints, all filthy, covered with bat shit, and who came?”

OLIVIA: “It's the works, here we see the works that Christ talks about, love, and those who get liberated gradually see what the Gospel is like. But the others want none of that; they'd rather go away and not come back; they're poor people with the ears of rich people.”

ALEJANDRO, her son: “It's because they don't hear, says Antidio. They don't see or hear!”

I: “We have to make clear that here we're not yet doing the works of the Gospel. It's Olivia's goodness of heart that makes her say that the works are here. A few medicines that we give out don't mean a thing, and we really don't have many. And the fact that we're making known abroad the primitive paintings of the Solentiname *campesinos* is of little importance. We help in little ways. The works, homes, schools, hospitals, clinics: these can't be achieved by this little group gathered in this church.”

ANTIDIO: “In a certain way, without exaggeration but also without denying it, this Mass and this Gospel commentary that's happening here is happening for thousands of people who aren't here. I don't know how many copies have been sold of the first volume of *The Gospel in Solentiname*, but I'll give you this fact: In Venezuela, when I came here, they had sold a thousand copies. That's a thousand people getting the message about what's being done here. It's a Mass that afterwards multiplies, like a seed that you sow and later it becomes many more. What's important about the sale of the book is not that the book is sold, or even that it's read. It's a book that's meant to be thought about. And the people that read this book are always people that want to do something. And the person that buys one of these books lends it to one or two other people. So that when we're here, and

we're only sixty or seventy people, it's not really true that we're sixty or seventy. At this very moment, in a real way though not physically present here, we're five, six, seven thousand. [I interrupt Antidio to tell him that the copies that have been sold, in several languages, may be already thirty thousand.] Plus what's been published in newspapers and magazines and what's been read in college lecture rooms, where students ask you for copies. And it's not just other Christians who are interested in all this. Everyone is interested who, to say it evangelically, has good will, and 'will' means to want to do something. And what they want to do is, well, to build a new kind of society. And the interest and even the passion that this arouses, don't you believe it's just Christian feeling. It's rather the non-Christians who are eager to read these things. And I'm not the only one that can tell you this. Mayra can tell you too, for she moves in the same circles as I do. And I mention this simply as I told you before, so you'll feel not important but needed. Like other groups in other places. You must be aware that you're not alone or isolated. You're helping others. Just as others are helping you, for example, by buying Solentiname paintings. There are people who buy Solentiname paintings not only because they like the paintings, which are very beautiful, but also because they come from Solentiname. As I come from outside I talk to you this way. If I lived here maybe I wouldn't be talking this way, but as I come from outside I tell you what I bring from outside…. "

Antidio went on talking, but our recording tape was used up on both sides.

78.

The Rich Epicure and Poor Lazarus

(Luke 16:19–31)

It's the parable of the rich man that had parties every day, while the poor man was at his door covered with sores.

FELIPE: “I think the poor man here stands for all the poor, and the rich man for all the rich. The poor man is saved and the rich man is damned. That's the story, a very simple one, that Jesus tells.”

I: “Christians usually believe that the good rich man is saved and only the bad rich man is condemned. But that's not what is said here. The rich man isn't called evil, he's just called rich. And why is he damned?”

Little ADAN: “Because he was happy.”

ELVIS: “While the other was screwed.”

I said that was exactly what Abraham says in the parable, when the rich man in his place of torment asks for a drop of water:

> *My son, remember that you had things very good in your life, and Lazarus had them very bad. Now he is comforted here, and you suffer*.

FELIPE: “What I think is that neither the rich nor the poor ought to suffer the fate of those two guys in the Gospel. The rich man damned for having squandered selfishly, and the poor man screwed all his life even though afterwards he's saved. Which means there shouldn't be rich or poor, nobody should be screwed in this life, nobody should be damned in the next life. All people ought to share the riches in this life and share the glory in the next one.”

ALEJO: “Yes, then the rich man couldn't have thrown parties every day; maybe he could have thrown parties, but not every day, and Lazarus could have been at those parties.”

GLORIA: “The rich man's sin was that he had no compassion. Poverty was at his door and that didn't disturb him at his parties.”

JULIO: “Now there are lots of Lazaruses that the rich have at the doors of their parties.”

I: “And the poor man is badly off because the rich man is well off, or the rich man is well off because the poor man is badly off. There are poor people because there are rich people, and there are rich people because there are poor people. And rich people's parties are at the cost of the poor people.”

WILLIAM: “I've been thinking what to do to give an interpretation to this passage that wouldn't be the one that's traditionally given to it, and that seems to me wrong, and that has been used for exploitation: because the poor man has been led to believe that he must patiently endure because after death he's going to be better off and that the rich will get their punishment.”

FELIPE: “As I see it, this passage was rather to threaten the rich so they wouldn't go on exploiting; but it seems it turned out the opposite: it served to pacify the people.”

ALEJANDRO: “You don't want to see either of them screwed. If we were selfish we'd say: let the rich continue with their scheme and let the poor man get saved. But that would be kind of bad, wouldn't it? To want the rich man to get screwed because of his wealth.”

PANCHO: “This Gospel is for the rich, and they ought to listen to it.”

JULIO: “There's no point in its being for them if they don't read it, and if they do read it they pay no heed. The rich man of this parable cares nothing for God; and that's the way the rich still are nowadays.”

OLIVIA: “I think the word of God has been very badly preached, and the church is much to blame in this. It's because the Gospel hasn't been well preached that we have a society still divided between rich and poor. There are few places like this one where the Gospel is preached and we understand it. Also, it's us poor people who understand it. Unfortunately, the rich don't come to hear it. Where the rich are, there's no preaching like that.”

FELIPE: “But you know we can work to be rich too.”

OLIVIA: “Nobody here works to get rich.”

FELIPE: “Or at least to have more than the others, or to exploit others if we can.”

MARIITA: “Or maybe at least we're not willing to share. Here the rich man's sin was not sharing. Not sharing with everybody, that is, with the poor, too; because he *did* share with the rich: the Gospel says he gave parties every day.”

OLIVIA: “It was with other rich people like himself.”

JULIO: “They weren't inviting the poor; they'd get their houses dirty.”

OLIVIA: “And why didn't they preach this before, I want to know!”

MANUEL: “But all the rich go right on without believing, Doña Olivia, even though a dead man comes back to life.”

We read that the rich man asked for the resurrection of the poor man so that he could go and convince the rich man's five brothers, who were also rich. And Abraham answered:

> *If they don't want to heed Moses and the Prophets, they are not going to believe, even though a dead man comes to life*.

I: “I believe this parable was not to console the poor but rather to threaten the rich; but as you said, William, it has had the opposite effect, because the rich weren't going to heed it. But Christ himself is saying that in this parable: that the rich pay no attention to the Bible.”

LAUREANO: “In the churches in the big cities you see exactly the same picture that's painted here: inside are the bourgeois at Mass, and maybe outside in the courtyard there are some beggars.”

I: “And surrounding the quarters of the rich are those miserable quarters covered with sores. Now in the bourgeoisie there is a Pentecostal Movement, which is above all lots of reading of the Bible, but they don't believe what Moses and the Prophets say, that is, the message of liberation in the Bible.”

FELIPE: “Because for them it's like reading a bunch of nonsense that makes no sense.”

OSCAR: “It seems like it doesn't do any good to be reading the Bible, then, because if you don't want to change the social order, you might as well be reading any damned thing, you might as well be reading any stupid book.”

I: “It seems to me that Jesus’ principal message is that the rich aren't going to be convinced even with the Bible, not even with a dead man coming to life (and not even with Jesus’ resurrection).”

“So what can we do?”

ALEJANDRO (joking): “Force them to believe.”

ELVIS: “The message is also, it seems to me, that humanity should not go on like that with those two classes: the one of the guy that throws parties every day, and the one of the guy that's at the door covered with sores.”

WILLIAM: “Abraham has told the rich man who is being damned that there is an ‘abyss’ between him and the other man. There is an impassible, total separation. And it's the rich man who has placed that abyss of separation between the two of them.”

I: “There are now advanced sectors among Christians who don't believe much in hell. It seems to me a very revolutionary dogma: that there is a place of damnation and that the rich are in it.”

79.

The Expulsion of the Merchants from the Temple

(Matthew 21:12–17)

They came from Canada to make a film here. They wanted it to be a kind of message from Solentiname for the president-elect of the United States. They had no pre-conceived idea. The film would be what the people spontaneously would wish to say here. It would be entitled: *A Memorandum for Carter*. They began by filming the commentary on the Gospel of this Sunday.

> *Afterwards Jesus went into the temple and threw out all those who were selling and buying there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the stands of the pigeon sellers; and he said to them: "In the Scriptures it says: 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a den of thieves."*

While cameras are focusing on us from various angles:

OLIVIA: "I think he drove them out because they were exploiting people, because all trade is exploitation, and not because they were profaning the temple with cows and other animals. The desecration of the temple was the exploitation."

GLORIA: "And, as I see it, that action was against all those people that trade with religion."

WILLIAM: "And in general against all the people who have made use of religion (of the various religions down through history) to maintain a

system of exploitation.”

ESPERANZA: “The difference between the temples before and the temples now is that now there are no animals in the temples. But the traders are still inside.”

ALEJANDRO: “They make no distinction between robbery and trade.”

BOSCO: “Well, trade is appropriating the surplus-value of another; if not, it's not business.”

I: “Apart from the Gospels there are documents that say that the trading concessions in the temple were in the hands of a few powerful families, among them the family of the high priest. It seems that Jesus’ action wasn't so much against the merchants that he was driving out of there, and who were just employees, as it was against the highest authorities who were responsible for that organization. It's against them that the accusation of Jesus is directed, that they have converted the temple into a den of thieves. I have also read an interesting commentary: that the word ‘thieves’ in Greek means ‘guerrilla fighters,’ just as now the members of the Sandinistas are called criminals by the Military Court. They used to call the zealots thieves, and Jesus probably uses the word to tell the authorities that it's they who are the thieves and not the guerrilla fighters up in the mountains.”

OSCAR: “The temple ought to be a place of unity (where God would be present among them), and if there was exploitation it wasn't a place of unity anymore. Because that trading was against love, and God couldn't be there anymore.”

I: “We have to keep in mind that the money changers were needed for the offerings that had to be made with a special kind of coin, the ancient temple coin, because they didn't allow there the current money, which was Roman. And the sale of the animals was for the sacrifices. The Gospel mentions only the pigeons, perhaps because that was the commonest sacrifice since it was the sacrifice of the poor people (Mary, as a poor woman, offered one of those pigeons when Jesus was born). So that commerce performed a liturgical function. But it seems that Jesus didn't care much about the worship; what he cared about was stopping the trading.”

FELIPE: “When in a country like Cuba there are no more merchants, and they don't even allow street hawkers, the temple has been purified.”

I: “Jesus joins in a single phrase two quotations from the prophets: one is from Isaiah, in which God says that his house will be called a house of

prayer for all the peoples, and another from Jeremiah, in which he says that they have converted his house into a den where thieves gather. That business about its being a house of prayer isn't the most important thing here for Jesus but that it should be *for all the peoples*. And the contradiction that he sees isn't so much between prayer and trading; the irreconcilable contradiction is that the house of prayer that ought to be to unite all the people and to free all of humanity has been converted into a center for the exploitation of the people and a business place for a few."

ALEJANDRO: "Here all trading is condemned, not just trading inside churches. All trading is crap. Because he doesn't tell them: You've made the temple into a trading center. He tells them: You've made it a den of thieves."

WILLIAM: "Selling isn't bad, the way it's done in Cuba. It's lending a service. As long as it isn't done for profit."

I: "Like the people that come to sell bread or soda on Sundays; and we let them sell right here inside the church. For example, there's Doña Felipa with her breadbasket, and she's going to sell bread after Mass inside the church, and none of us see that as a desecration."

ALEJANDRO: "There are times when some people slip up. Sure, naturally they have to make their little profit, get the best of the other guy; there's no reason to lend a service for nothing, and we're in a system where we have to live with this kind of thing; but don't let them go too far."

NATALIA: "Any trading that's done without charity, that's what's bad."

I: "When I was in Chile, a revolutionary monk who belonged to M.I.R. told me that it was very clear that this had been a commando action. Jesus by himself couldn't have overturned the tables with the money and the booths and driven out all the merchants. It's known that there was a temple policeman who kept order."

OLIVIA: "It's possible. I hadn't understood it that way, but it's possible."

I: "He went in with a lot of people. The Gospel says afterwards that the authorities didn't dare to proceed against him because of fear of the people. They probably went in through the various doors of the temple, and it was a surprise action. Matthew says he threw out not only the sellers but also those who were buying, and John adds that he forbade them to go around inside the temple carrying loads, so the control of the temple was complete. And as if that wasn't enough, he afterwards began to teach in the temple. The Gospel relates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem the day before. He had entered like a king. There existed the custom of laying red

carpets as kings passed, and when the crowds spread their cloaks before him it meant that they were proclaiming him king. Matthew says that at that entrance ‘the whole city was much moved.’ And Mark adds a significant detail, that Jesus, after his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, *inspected* the temple. He said he reached the temple, ‘and after looking all around at things, he went off to Bethany with the twelve disciples because it was getting late.’”

ALEJANDRO: “It was like the seizing of churches that's been going on everywhere.”

GLORIA: “And the Romans let him do that?”

I: “The Romans were much concerned about the temple, because it was the center of the Jews’ political power. Above it there was a Roman tower, the Antonia Tower, from where the soldiers were always spying on the temple. The seizure of the temple occurred in sight of the Romans. They let it take place considering that it was an internal struggle of the Jews.”

WILLIAM: “Just as the U.S. intervention in our countries doesn't meddle in partisan struggles, when they think those struggles don't threaten their interests, and that instead those internal divisions favor their interests.”

I: “Pilate cared nothing about Jesus’ messianism, because he considered it a religious conflict, until the Jewish authorities made him see that the messianism had serious political implications, that it meant that Jesus was king, and that the very power of Rome was being threatened. And Jesus didn't deny this to Pilate. He didn't say: I'm not coming to meddle in politics. He told him: I am king, and that's why I came into the world.”

WILLIAM: “It was a symbolic action that he performed. Because the following day merchants were going to be right back again. It seems to me he wasn't interested in purifying that temple of Jerusalem; his action was projected toward the future.”

I: “The text of Isaiah that Jesus quotes doesn't say ‘My house *is*’ but ‘My house *will be* a house of prayer for all peoples’; he was referring to the messianic era. So, as William says, Jesus wasn't trying to purify the temple of the Jewish religion (a temple that instead he was coming to destroy) but he was performing a symbolic action to show that with it the messianic era was already beginning, and that the new temple of the messianic era was already being inaugurated, the temple that would be for all peoples, and in which there could no longer be thieves. And Jesus was surely alluding to

another prophecy, of Zacharias, that says: ‘There will be no more merchants in the house of the Lord on that day.’”

JULIO: “It seems to me he wasn't referring to the temple, the temple like this one. He was referring to a person's temple. That a person is a temple. That's why no person should do evil business, it seems to me.”

I: “That's why we say it was a symbolic action. Afterwards the first Christians understood that they must not worship in temple. Saint Paul tells how he was praying in the Jerusalem temple and there he had a vision in which he was told to get out of there. Saint John in the Apocalypse says that in the New Jerusalem there will be no temple (it would seem that it's an atheistic materialistic Marxist that is talking), and he adds that the temple will be the whole universe. He means that there must not be any business deals, not only in church alcoves but also in the streets, in the squares, or in commercial centers; there must be no exploitation in the whole universe.”

WILLIAM: “Julio calls evil business what businessmen call good business.”

There in the temple some blind men and cripples approached and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the miracles that he was performing, and when they heard how the children were shouting in the temple: “Hosanna to the Son of King David!” they said to him: “Do you hear what they are saying?”

I: “ ‘Hosanna’ is a Hebrew word that is equivalent to ‘Hurray,’ and it literally means ‘Free us, then!’ It was a shout of acclaim for a leader. They are shouting: Hurray for King Jesus! The Gospel says that the children were shouting: I think it's referring to the young people. They were probably the young people that went in with him on that commando operation. They probably weren't young kids who would have had no reason to be doing such a thing.”

ALEJANDRO: “They were like, say, students.”

I: “The Gospel has said that it was with that shout of ‘Hosanna’ that they had greeted him the day before in Jerusalem. It was probably those same ‘children,’ the young people, who were the principal ones to acclaim him as king.”

ALEJANDRO: “Yes, when he says the children they must be them, the young people. Because it used to be that young people between fifteen and

eighteen weren't worth much; it was the old people who bossed everything, and those old people must have been great reactionaries."

WILLIAM: "In those times the leaders were called ancients, because only the old had any authority. That's why the first Christians called their leaders 'presbyters,' which means ancients, even though they were young."

ALEJANDRO: "The young people were with him. And that made the leaders really mad."

I: "What the kids were shouting made them mad. And it seems that Jesus answered them joking, to make them even madder, quoting a Psalm from the Bible."

Yes, I hear them. But haven't you read the Scripture that says: "Out of the mouths of children and infants you receive perfect praise"?

JULIO: "I see young people shouting now as they shouted when they were with Jesus in the temple. The young people now want a change too, and this shouting is not pleasing to the rich, the ones who are enjoying their privileges, and so they try to shut them up. They really don't want to hear the young people shouting 'Hurray for change! Hurray for joy!' Because what they want is to have oppression and sadness."

I: "Even though those old men didn't want to hear those voices, these young people had burst out into the streets of Jerusalem, when Jesus entered, shouting 'Hurray for the revolution!' That means exactly the same as the Gospel sentence: 'Blessed be the kingdom to come!' The word 'kingdom' on the lips of Jesus meant the same as the word 'revolution' now means."

JULIO: "And that's why they killed him. And they'll go right on killing anyone that wants a change, a new kingdom, a revolution."

WILLIAM: "He must have gone into the temple with his people. If he'd gone in alone they'd have murdered him, because traders are the worst people there are. And the people helped him to overturn tables. It's clear that everything was well organized. And afterwards there was a meeting. That reference here to the blind and crippled means the temple was full of poor people."

I: "In addition to the young people, the students, who are the ones that shouted 'Hurray.'"

GLORIA: “But afterwards he came out. He didn't try to hold on to the temple.”

WILLIAM: “If he had tried to, the Roman Marines would have arrived.”

I: “He enters Jerusalem with the acclaim of the whole people. After the action in the temple he retires to Bethany where it seems he was in hiding. From then on he appears in public only by surprise. He finally goes into hiding, and to capture him they have to resort to the treachery of Judas. Afterwards, he was taken to the Sanhedrin where the temple business came up. He was accused through false witnesses of having said he would destroy ‘this temple made by man's hands,’ in order to build another one. But the phrase ‘made by man's hands’ may have been an authentic phrase of Jesus’ and he probably said it to remind the Jews that that sacred temple had been built by Herod.”

FELIPE: “After he drove out the traders Jesus taught in the temple. He was probably conscientizing them. He was probably teaching Christianity and talking against the temple.”

LAUREANO: “Now the big churches are full of rich people, people from the Bank of America and from all the big banks, and the priests are preaching to them. But I don't think their preaching is worth a damn.”

FELIPE: “He taught above all by example, driving out the traders and bankers, teaching us that we had to put an end to the exploitation of people by people. Even if it has to be done with a whip.”

Someone asked, smiling: “With a whip, but not with a machine gun?”

FELIPE: “Either with a whip or a machine gun.”

ALEJO: “Whichever is needed. Because the exploitation that capitalism makes of our bodies is a greater desecration than the one in the temple.”

I: “The supporters of absolute nonviolence have a lot of difficulty explaining this passage. Some say that Christ here did not act like a man but like God, and that he could do those things as God. Others say that a whip was a gentle weapon that injures nobody. Others say that he wouldn't use the whip against men but only against animals, because in Greek it's not very clear whether he used the whip against men or against animals. None of that seems to me convincing. But in another commentary on the Gospel I read recently an interesting detail: that it was forbidden to enter the temple with weapons or clubs. Therefore the only weapon that Jesus could use was the one he used. The Gospel according to Saint John says that he took ropes

and with them made a whip. It's more logical to think that they made many whips.”

ESPERANZA: “And the fact that Jesus cured the sick reminds me of Che, who in the midst of the attacks, when he was fighting, took care of people, because he was a doctor.”

OLIVIA: “Che and others like him are like Christ, they seem a lot like Christ, and they are the ones that are purifying the temple of the traders and exploiters.”

I: “The temple that is now the universe.”

Before the dialogue ended something went wrong with the camera and they stopped filming. They couldn't fix the camera and the people who came to make the film had to return to Canada, leaving the project pending until another occasion.

80.

The Wedding Feast

(Matthew 22:1–14)

The kingdom of heaven is like a king who arranged a feast for the wedding of his son. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come.

OLIVIA: “Jesus compares the kingdom of God with a wedding feast, first, because that kingdom is a love like the love of two people that join in matrimony, and second, because the wedding feast is the most joyful of feasts, and that kingdom is a great joy, a great feast.”

MANUEL: “Christ is the son; and our union with him is like the union of a couple.”

FELIPE: “I think this ought to be cleared up a little: the truth is that when you join Christ is when you join the others, the comrades. To be joined to Christ without being joined to the others isn't possible. To be joined to the rest is to be joined to Christ.”

I: “When we join the rest, we join Christ, and since Christ is God we join God, and this union is like that of two spouses.”

ALEJANDRO: “And the feast? Why do they say that the kingdom of God is a joy, a feast?”

I: “If there's a marriage between God and us, there has to be a celebration of that union, a feast.”

ALEJANDRO: “But wouldn't love be like a continuous feast?”

I: “The true feast is the feast of love. This means this image that Jesus uses, of a feast with joy, music, dancing, liquor, a feast to celebrate a union of love.”

Another: “The society that Jesus wants for us is a society of much joy.”

ELVIS: “Probably he wants to have this society here on earth; and it will be a tremendous joy for all of humanity.”

Another: “And the feast is also a gathering, right? The feast, to be really a feast, has to be with lots of people. Just four people gathered there don't make a feast.”

WILLIAM: “The reason for the joy is that there are two who are getting married, who love each other.”

OLIVIA: “And at the feast there's always a great abundance of good things. It seems like he's talking there about a society where there'll be a great abundance and it'll be shared. The kingdom of God isn't on earth yet because the meal isn't shared yet. It's love that's going to cause that sharing on earth, right? Because the cause of that feast was a wedding.”

But the guests did not heed him. One of them went to his estates, another to his affairs.

LAUREANO: “Those were the rich. People that were in business, and people with lots of property; all they think about is their affairs, their property.”

BOSCO: “The feast was very good. He had killed lots of steers and lots of pigs. He was inviting them sincerely. He was inviting them to have a good time. If they don't go, screw them. They turned down a good time to attend to their businesses.”

OLIVIA: “The ones that defend their private interests, it seems to me they're the ones that don't get into the kingdom.”

And others seized the king's servants and they beat them and killed them. Then the king was very angry and he sent his soldiers to kill those murderers and to burn their town.

“But why were those guys so much against him?”

“They must have been from a city that was an enemy of the king, and they were against the wedding, and instead of going to the feast, what they want to do is make war on the king.”

“Those are murderers. The rich aren't interested in the feast, and they simply don't go. And they don't want to have a feast, and they kill the ones who are invited. Like today there's people that persecute and torture and kill

people who are trying to do them good: people who are inviting them to the feast of love.”

“The kingdom of heaven hasn't been established yet. It's a kingdom we're being invited to. And we haven't yet seen that punishment of the king who ordered that enemy city to be burned down, where there must surely have been another king. Or maybe we're seeing it only in part. But one thing is certain: the feast is not going to get ruined.”

> *Then he said to his servants: “All is ready for the feast, but those guests did not deserve to come. Go out then to the main streets and invite to the wedding everybody you meet.”*

“It seems to me that this verse refers to the simple class, to poor people like us.”

“And those people that were hungry would go running to the feast.”

“I think this Gospel is very peculiar.”

I: “It's certainly a very peculiar Gospel, and we might say that Jesus is giving us an extravagant example: a king who gives a feast and none of his guests arrive, and then he fills the house with strangers from the streets. Saint Luke says he sent out to invite the poor, the lame, the crippled, and the blind, and afterwards he sent out to bring others by force to the feast. We may say that this feast of the kingdom is also, from a worldly point of view, an extravagant feast: It's a great joy but it's not for those who have wealth and power but for the poor of the earth and for the underdogs.”

“And some people will have to be ordered to go to that joy.”

“I don't see why they had to invite the rich and the powerful first.”

I: “It seems that Jesus saw that the rulers of society, the people with lands or businesses or power of any kind, were the ones who were called on to change society, but they didn't accept the invitation of history. The second invitation is for the ones on the sidelines, and they really came piling in.”

LAUREANO: “Those were the ones that needed the sharing of the wealth. The rich didn't need any sharing.”

FELIPE: “They went out to tell them that there's a very good meal, that there's a joyful feast, but those people have their own amusements or their own businesses and they're not interested in going to the feast. On the other

hand, poor people are told that the king invites them to a great feast, that there's a heap of beef cooked there, and everybody goes."

"Even though it was only tamales."

FELIPE: "The same thing happens now. If you say to people that are well off that God has prepared a kingdom of abundance and love and joy for humanity, they're not much interested. But if they're poor people, then they *are* interested, and they're capable of struggling for that."

ALEJANDRO: "Others commit murder because the feast makes them mad."

I: "Jesus was probably seeing that his followers were only poor people, and that the rich and the powerful weren't interested in his message, or were against it. And then he thinks of this comparison. Humanity is divided in two, those who accept the invitation to love and those who reject it; and this division corresponds to two social classes."

> *The servants went out into the streets and gathered everyone they found, good and bad; and so the hall filled with people*.

FELIPE: "The bad ones are going to get to be good, the ones they call bad, people who are going to change, and they'll also form the future society."

I: "The Pharisees thought they were the good ones, and they thought the kingdom would be a religious kingdom, of people who were good according to them (religious people), and Jesus is saying that the kingdom will be with all the poor on earth, good and evil, for even among the poor there can be evil ones."

LAUREANO: "As a result of living in a corrupt society. People go around the streets robbing other people, and they do it because they need to."

ALEJANDRO: "The important thing here is that Jesus is talking about all classes. It was only one class that arrived, the other didn't even come near. So the kingdom of heaven is identified with the poor, with that social class."

We read that later the king went in and saw one who was not wearing wedding clothes.

> *And he said to him: "Friend, how is it that you came in here without wedding clothes?" But the other one was silent. Then the king said to those who were waiting on table: "Tie him hand and foot and throw him into outer darkness, where he will weep and gnash his teeth."*

LAUREANO: “I'm sorry for the one they threw out because he was poorly dressed: he was probably going around all shitty.”

I said that we may suppose that the king would have given a tunic to each guest.

“That one who was poorly dressed was just the same as the ones who wouldn't attend, the first ones invited. He too snubbed the king when he didn't accept the clothes; he came there just to make trouble and the king got sore, too.”

“There are some who eliminate themselves, and those appear here as the rich. Among those who go in, there can be one who also scorns the feast, and that one has to be eliminated too.”

DONALD: “And that one, wouldn't he be there to spy on the others?”

A recently arrived schoolteacher broke in, and we suspected that he could be a new spy that they've sent us, and he said a few incoherent phrases.

FELIPE: “That one arrived to join the party but he wasn't with the spirit of the feast, he wasn't sharing in the joy, and that's why he didn't want to put on that garment. Jesus wants us to see that among those who reach the kingdom there may be some who aren't worthy and they'll have to be thrown out.”

“Man, look, I think we're having this meeting and we're talking here about the revolution, about love (for me, love is the revolution), and that we ought to unite, and maybe there's some shit that's listening, snooping on what we're talking about, our plan, and that bastard goes to the authorities and we find out he's a spy (that occurs to me because they've just said that man of the parable could be a spy) and then we'd get rid of him quick, because the group's not going to get screwed on account of him. Maybe the same thing happened at that wedding. That's why the king got sore and condemned him.”

ALEJANDRO: “Maybe they questioned him and he couldn't answer.”

For many are called, but few are chosen.

TERE: “And it's up to us to be chosen or to be rejected from the community. Jesus calls damnation the ‘outer darkness.’ It's being separated from the rest of the people.”

I: “You don't go into hell, you come out into it. Hell, according to Jesus, is outside.”

“And he's saying that, though the feast is for everyone, there's a bunch of people that don't accept it. That's why the kingdom takes time; everything is ready now, but there's had to be a second invitation.”

OLIVIA: “Long ago, the kingdom of heaven would have been established, but through thinking about the God in heaven we haven't been concerned about the gods that suffer on earth.”

ESPERANZA, who is going to marry Bosco soon: “I think this Gospel is very good. And very clear also.”

I: “When I was in Chile, at the little hotel where I was staying, a monk came to see me who belonged to the M.I.R. (and he was armed and half underground, although it was during the government of the Popular Front), and he told me this parable: ‘Humanity is now like a girl of twelve who doesn't want to play with dolls anymore, and she wants to be independent of papa and mamma; this is the atheism that all humanity is coming to, and it's positive because it's due to a process of maturing; religion belonged to the childhood of humanity. But the girl is not wholly mature; later she'll be a woman, and she'll feel alone and that she needs someone, and then God the bridegroom will appear. Right now she doesn't feel the need for marriage and we mustn't talk to her much about it so as not to upset her, but at times we have to talk to her a little so she won't grow up selfish or become a lesbian or try to commit suicide. The role of the contemplative monk is to remind that girl that she is destined to be wed. That wedding of God and humanity took place in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but later it's going to take place with us all when we, all together, form a united humanity and we are all Christ. We are all cells of that body that is going to have sexual union with God.’”

“Now nobody's going to be a bachelor, and there won't be any loneliness anymore,” said a bachelor.

OSCAR: “But let's not let happen to us what happened to that one: that we're put up against the wall.”

81.

The Tribute to Caesar

(Matthew 22:15–22)

The Pharisees and Herodians joined forces to lay a trap for Jesus, asking him about the tribute to Caesar.

I: “The Pharisees and the Herodians were enemies, but they joined forces against Jesus. Herod was a defeatist; in his court they spoke the language of Rome, they dressed in Roman style, their customs and their festivals were Roman. The Pharisees were nationalists, but they were reactionaries, and in the long run they became reconciled with the Romans. If Jesus came out in favor of the duty, they would accuse him before the people as a collaborationist; if he came out as opposed to it, they would accuse him before the Romans as a subversive.”

Jesus asked them to show him a coin and they showed him a denarius.

> *Jesus asked them: “Whose is this face and the name that is written on it?” They answered him: “Caesar's.” Then Jesus said to them: “Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God.” When they heard this they were astonished; and they left him and they went away*.

LAUREANO: “What he did was confuse them. He confused them there; they probably didn't understand him, and that's why they went away.”

I: “What Laureano says is quite true. He had to get away. He couldn't speak out, because if he did he'd fall into the trap. For a long time they've interpreted this in a reactionary way, that you have to serve the state, even though it's unjust, and God at the same time, giving to each one its own—as

if Christ here ought to have talked clearly, when he's talking enigmatically. If Jesus had said simply that it was necessary to submit to Rome, he would have fallen into the trap, and that is what they wanted. In his story Luke adds that ‘they could not accuse him before the people because of his words.’ But the reactionaries go on making us believe that Jesus fell into the trap.”

“I get the impression that he says that first we have to build the kingdom of love, and that the confrontation with Rome will come later. He didn't want to open a front on which he couldn't fight immediately, but he would leave it for later.”

“And he points out to them a real fact. When he asked them to show him a coin, they show him a denarius, which was the Roman coin.”

“The dollar.”

I: “It wasn't that the coins belonged to the emperor, they belonged to the empire. They had to admit that they were a colony, and this was a reality that couldn't be changed. The zealots, the supporters of armed struggle, thought they could struggle against Rome with swords, but that was suicide. And we also have to take into account that for Jesus the greatest oppression wasn't that of Rome but of the Jewish religious castes. The power of Rome could end, as in fact it did, and the oppressions continue. After the system of slavery, feudalism had to come, and afterwards, capitalism.”

LAUREANO: “He's presenting communism as a goal, but you couldn't skip steps.”

“As the emperor was fond of money, it seems to me, he even had his face portrayed on the coin. And that was like wanting all the money to belong to him. And then Jesus says that if he loved riches so much and wanted the riches of others to belong also to him, well, for the moment they had to leave him in his riches, that is, in his selfishness. And the idea that we must give to God what belongs to God means that we must give him what he asks of us, which is unselfishness and love.”

LAUREANO: “Yes, it seems to me that what he's saying here is that we must give God love. To give God what belongs to God is to give him love, brotherly love, because love belongs to God since God is love. And that we should give our selfishness to the emperor, because money is selfishness. Because the emperor wants the money not for the poor but for himself and he doesn't want it to be distributed.”

“It seems to me that he adds the business about God, counterposing it to the first, and in opposition to it. The business about the duty is a question of detail; they had to admit that they were a colony of the empire, but they had to attack the imperialist system when they gave to God what is God's, because God means liberation.”

“It isn't that the money belonged to the emperor; the money belonged to the people, but he tells them to notice the coin, so they can see what imperialism is: a coin with the face of the man there. He wanted them to see that from the time when an emperor puts his name and face on a coin he's making himself boss of everything in the country, of everybody, of the money that belongs to everybody. And Jesus is showing them that Caesar's a complete dictator because he's putting his portrait on the coin and taking for himself what belongs to the people. He's telling them that he's grabbing the money, because he's pictured there as owner and lord of everything; then he wants to make himself owner even of the people, because he was on the money with which people were buying. Let's say that it's like now in Nicaragua, with Somoza, because Somoza is on the money, and we're all used to seeing him as the owner of Nicaragua; that's the way it was at that time. I believe he wants to tell them that all things belong to God, but that the emperor wants to make himself owner of everything when he makes himself owner of the people's money.”

ALEJANDRO: “A businessman, a banker, are people that talk only about money, are portrayed on money, are money pure and simple. And that God, there, was something very different from money, was class struggle, struggle for a change, for the triumph of the people. He's telling them: that stuff about the emperor was only a question of money, but God is something different, with which we're going to defeat the dictator, the emperor; I believe that's the distinction that he's making, that God is more, that it's not just money but the whole economy.”

I said that what Alejandro said was very true. Here Christ is making a distinction between God and money; and he's also making a distinction between God and the emperor. At that time the emperor was God. And the cult of the emperor was changing into a dominant religion in the whole empire. We have coins of Tiberius, emperor at the time of Christ, that say: “Tiberius, Caesar, son of the divine Augustus.” That's just what was being said on that coin they took out. And Christ told them that the duty was one thing and worship was another. And he's also making a distinction between

the kingdom of God and the Jewish nation. The zealots believed that just by freeing themselves from Roman control the kingdom of God would be established. And they thought that tribute was a sin because those who were of the “people of God” could not pay tribute to the pagans. The question they ask him is of a moral nature: if it is *licit* to pay tribute. And Christ is also answering for the zealots. Besides I've read that the Greek word that Christ uses means exactly “return.” So the phrase allowed another meaning: return that foreign coin that doesn't belong to you. Anyway they understood that Christ was not in favor of the duty, and that's why Luke says that they couldn't accuse him “before the people.” And later they accused him before Pilate of inciting the people not to pay the duty to Rome.

“Because they knew that his doctrine was against the imperialism of that time. And against all imperialism. But the bastards laid a good trap for him!”

“He gives them an answer like you can give to a spy. From the beginning he calls them hypocrites. He doesn't answer them as you'd answer a man of good faith who wants to know the truth. It's as if a spy came now to question us and then to go to denounce us. He insults them from the beginning, and in public besides.”

I: “Of course Luke, in relating this passage, adds the fact that those who came to Jesus were ‘spies.’”

“He acted like a politician, like a director of the masses who's not letting himself be screwed. He acted tactically.”

“Besides he's dealing not only with the problem of the Jews; he's talking for all peoples.”

“Yes, because they were thinking only about their local problem, to free themselves from the Roman Empire, and the rest of the earth was not liberated.”

I: “Nor were they liberated from their other oppressions. Internal oppression, class oppression, that was worse. Because often local governments were worse than the government of Rome. The Roman Empire was more modern; it represented progress in comparison with other regimes of antiquity. Now we have overcome the stage of the emperor of the slave society, and that of the kings of feudal society, and we're overcoming that of capitalism. The day will come when it won't be necessary to give any tax to the state, and there won't be a state any more, and we're only going to give to God what belongs to God.”

“The emperor no longer exists. But there's imperialism.”

“Imperialism, then as now, has always been united with the money god.”

“To give to God what belongs to God is to bring about revolution.”

I: “Yes, because in the Bible God always reveals himself as Liberation. Yahweh is a force that impels us to change to revolution, that's the message of all the prophets. Here Christ is saying that we must give to God what belongs to God, and in another passage he says, repeating the Prophet Hosea, what it is that God wants us to give him: ‘I want love and not sacrifices’ (and not religious worship).”

WILLIAM: “But money isn't bad, it's good. It's the only thing that, because it's good, ought to belong to everybody. Money isn't selfishness. But money is to be circulated and selfishness consists of hoarding the money and preventing it from circulating.”

I: “That's also very good what William says. We can sum this all up by saying that love consists of sharing the money, and giving to God what belongs to God is making people love one another and making the wealth belong to everyone. And in the end there'll be no more need for money. Isn't that right?”

“That's it.”

At this Mass we had brother John with us. He was a young American visiting us. He wore sandals and a white robe with gold embroidery. His delicate profile, his parted beard, and his curly hair that came down to his shoulders gave him a close resemblance to Christ, as Christ is pictured in religious prints. He had been going around the world for six years, living only by begging alms, although his parents owned a luxurious hotel in South Africa. We noticed that wild dogs, as soon as they saw him, stopped barking and ran eagerly toward him; and babies gave great demonstrations of joy on seeing him. We were also very aware that his white robe was always immaculate, even though he had only one and slept in it in the streets or the fields. His belongings were minimal: a change of underclothes, one book (the Gospels), and a flute. He spoke Spanish very well.

JOHN said: “Dear brothers and sisters: I am brother John, a disciple of Jesus and a follower of Saint Francis of Assisi. I have been delighted to hear all that has been said here about the state and money. I want to add that Jesus asked them to show him a coin because he didn't go around with coins and he never touched money. Saint Francis didn't touch money either, and

he forbade the Franciscans to touch it. I have tried to follow this example, and I go through all countries without using money. I'm not a hippy, although I was one. Through drugs I was converted to a life of meditation, chastity, and poverty, but for six years now I haven't used drugs. During the first two years I made a vow to live on charity without begging for alms, just waiting until someone gave me something; that was more difficult, sometimes I was afraid, but not once in the two years was I hungry. Now I feel freer and I can beg for alms; but I never beg for money and when I get more than I need at that moment I give it away at once. Living off other people is very good for you because you always have to be smiling and be very pleasant; if you aren't they won't give you anything. I get on a bus and I smile at the driver and I say to him: ‘Dear brother, I am brother John, a disciple of Jesus, and I have made a vow not to carry money.’ Almost always the driver sits me beside him and begins to ask me questions and I leave with him the message of love. If we get to a bridge and I see a river that I like, I ask him to stop and I get off right there and I bathe in that river. Then I find someone else who will take me where I was going. This way I've been traveling around Latin America. In Colombia another American pilgrim told me that he had heard of this community and I decided to come to Solentiname. In Cartagena I begged in the stores for ship passage to San Andrés Island, explaining that I wanted to go to Solentiname. In San Andrés the bishop took up a collection to buy me an air ticket to Managua. In Managua a beggar that I met in the cathedral offered to serve as my guide and showed me the whole city. The venders in the market offered me food the moment they saw me. The driver of a bus that was going to Granada invited me to get on without my asking him. In Granada a priest saw me in the park and took me to a home to sleep. When I arrived the lights were out; in the morning, when I woke up I realized that the house was full of old people. That made me very happy. I went to the dock and asked a boat to let me on board free because I wanted to go to Solentiname. In San Carlos sister Olivia saw me in the street and gave me food and led me to a boat that was coming to Solentiname, telling them not to charge me. From here I'll go to Costa Rica, where I know I'll find a boat that will take me to India, and I know that the boat will be a sailing ship. I used to be a university student, I was getting a degree in engineering, I dressed very well. I had money, and I was self-centered. One day I decided to follow the example of Saint Francis. At first I went around dressed as a Franciscan but

at the Mexican border the Mexican Franciscans had the police arrest me because I wasn't a Franciscan. They were right, and since then I haven't worn the Franciscan habit, but I am a follower of Saint Francis, and they are not. In my wanderings I've been in jail several times but I'm never in very long because as soon as I'm jailed I stop eating and they have to let me out. I can't be imprisoned because I get very sad and I can only live free as the birds. I'd like to visit Cuba, but I don't know if they would let me beg there; there everything's controlled by a ration ticket. But I believe that in socialist countries they ought to allow beggars. At times I have doubts and I wonder if I'm not a parasite on society. But afterwards I think not, that I'm doing something useful, carrying a message around the world, with no need to preach anything: just seeing me. Maybe this type of life isn't suitable for a revolutionary country like Cuba; it's more suitable for a post-revolutionary world. For the present, we beggars announce that new world in which man can lead a life in a brotherly way and free and without money. That's why I go around disguised with this costume (I'm aware that this is a disguise). I go around like a clown, to attract attention, and so they'll give me alms, for they wouldn't give to me if they saw me in ordinary clothes, and so that I can give them the message."

We heard no more from brother John. He said he never wrote letters.

82.

Jesus Curses the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees

(Matthew 23:1–36)

The masters of the law and the Pharisees have sat down in the chair of Moses. Do and fulfill all that they say, but do not follow their example, because they say one thing and they do something else.

“He says that because they were teaching Scripture, and Scripture talks about love.”

“There's nothing evil in the Bible, says Jesus, because the whole message of the Bible is freedom. The evil thing is that in teaching the Bible some people, in practice, are defending the exploitation.”

“Jesus distinguishes very well between doctrine and practice. He recommends the Bible to us, but accompanied by revolutionary action.”

“And the doctrine of the Bible isn't good for anything unless it's practiced, right?”

I: “But it can be good for *us* if, as Christ says, we put into practice its freedom message that *they* didn't put into practice. Moses brought the people out of Egyptian slavery and took them to another land to found a kingdom of freedom, and the chair of Moses means the temple of freedom. Now just like then there are people in that temple preaching the Gospel and defending oppression. What they preach is false, but only because they don't practice it. If we put that into practice we change the world, we make a revolution.”

For they pile on burdens so heavy that it is impossible to endure them, and they make the people bear them, but they don't want to touch them even with a finger.

OLIVIA: “It seems to me it's like when the priests preach to the poor that they must be content with their poverty. Like they used to preach to us here, when a priest would come once in a great while. They'd say that poverty was better than riches, because Christ chose poverty. With poverty you could get to heaven. Why did we want to have what the rich had? To live like we lived was what God wanted, and we ought to be happy with our lot. And they didn't live like that. They lived on board fancy yachts that some rich man lent them because they were friends of the rich. They piled a heavy burden on the people, the burden of misery, and they wouldn't even touch that misery with a ten-foot pole. And I suppose there are still priests like that in other places.”

And they do everything so that people will look at them. On their foreheads and on their arms they like to wear parts of the Scripture written on wide bands and to put on clothes with longer fringes than other people.

MANUEL: “Like the crosses that bishops go around with on their chests and the things they put on their heads and the garments of silk and lace and all that stuff.”

GLORIA: “And going around with the Scriptures hanging on you reminds me of the Protestants that know the Bible by heart but they don't know how to love. They say that the Bible has nothing to do with politics. The poor have to be poor and the rich have to be rich and the exploiters exploit and the police kill and the bishops have no reason to interfere because they are ministers of Christ.”

I: “Christ is talking about some adornments called phylacteries, short bits of Scripture attached to the sleeves and the forehead, because in one of the books of the Bible it says that the Scripture should always be kept ‘close to the hand and in front of the eyes,’ and they believed that by doing this they were complying.”

WILLIAM: “You notice Jesus’ scorn when he describes those adornments. It's very ironic when he talks to them about the pieces of Scripture used as

adornments of their clothing to show off: what they attached to themselves were writings of the prophets denouncing their oppressions, And Jesus probably wasn't talking just for those people, he was talking also for the Christians that were going to go on doing the same thing in other ways."

> *They want to have the best places at meals and the seats of honor in the synagogues, and they want people to greet them with due respect in the streets and to call them teachers*.

MARIITA: "And this thing that Christ attacked is still going on, because those church people are still at the head table at banquets and guests of honor at the big festivals and receptions and they like to be treated with great respect: Monsignor So-and-So."

Her mother: "In the Managua churches, which are like the synagogues, they say big Masses with three or four priests, wearing fancy capes. There they are, sitting in their seats, celebrating a very expensive Mass."

WILLIAM: "And you have to call them Reverend, Most Reverend, Most Illustrious, Your Excellency."

FELIPE: "And they think they're there to teach the people and that the people can't teach them anything and that the commentaries on the Scripture have to be made by them, because they are the teachers of the law, the teachers of the Bible, and the people are ignorant."

> *But you must not make the people call you teachers, because you are all brothers and sisters and you have only one Teacher, who is Christ*.

"We're all equal. The only teacher is Christ, who is identified with the poor. The only teacher we have is the people."

"He's condemning all class distinctions, and having some people bossing other people."

I: " 'Christ' is not a proper name; it's the Greek word for Messiah, liberator. And he's saying that we're all equal and that we shouldn't have any teachers except the one that brings those teachings about revolution."

WILLIAM: "It seems to me that 'teacher' was a word that then meant something more than it says now. It was a mainly religious word. And I think he's alluding especially to those 'teachers of the law,' who were, so to speak, owners of religion. And he's opposing the religious imposition of that kind of people."

TERESITA, his wife: “The only leader is Christ, who brings no imposition except freedom.”

> *And do not call any man on earth father, because you have one Father, the one who is in Heaven. Nor must you make people call you leaders, for Christ is the only leader*.

“That's just the same as Jesus said before. He condemns all paternalism. The father can also be the boss, the one you don't love but you respect him and you fear him like a father, and sometimes, if he's good, you're grateful to him like to a father.”

“And there's another kind of father too, the leaders, who impose themselves by force, and we don't want to have that kind of father either.”

I: “Leader or any other title is all the same. Here in Nicaragua the title that creates the greatest respect and fear is ‘General.’”

“The Protestants don't call their ministers ‘father,’ because of what Jesus said. But it's not just a question of words. What he wants is to have no paternalism or tyranny of a leader, general, or anybody else.”

“Not calling anybody leader is not saying like everybody says here in Nicaragua: ‘the chief…. ’ The one that's screwing them is the chief.”

ALEJANDRO: “Nobody should be chief, in the sense that nobody should have privileges, not in the sense that we shouldn't have leaders. That's why we shouldn't cling to one little word in the Gospel. The one that serves other people, the one that knocks himself out most, you might say, that one is the chief, and it's no problem to call him chief.”

> *The one who serves others, that one is the greatest among you. For those who glorify themselves will be humbled, but those who humble themselves will be glorified*.

WILLIAM: “That's why it seems to me very good to call the leaders the way they are called in Cuba: ‘the responsible ones.’ The responsible ones are those who take on a responsibility, who have a burden on their shoulders that the others don't have: the burden of all the rest of the people. The responsible ones are the ones that serve.”

FELIPE: “The leaders don't become leaders because other people name them leaders, or because they name themselves, but through their own actions: because they serve the others.”

ALEJANDRO: “And humbling yourself, like we said before, isn't making an ass of yourself.”

TERESITA: “Humbling yourself is serving, and the opposite of serving others is to control others.”

I: “The goal of the Gospel and the goal of communism is a society without a state and then we won't have teachers or a father or a chief. The people will be the only master and lord.”

> *Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you close the door of the kingdom of heaven so that others will not go in. You do not go in yourselves and you do not let others go in who want to go in*.

“The kingdom, as we all know, is that perfect society. He's telling them their religion is delaying the kingdom.”

“It seems to me that it's because their children become other Pharisees right away, and they go on teaching others, each one another one, the older ones teaching the younger ones, and the children are going to become Pharisees later.”

“It seems to me that he's telling them that because the Pharisees weren't able to be loving, and they couldn't teach other people to love. They don't love, and with their teaching they prevent love in other people,” said FELIPE PEÑA.

ESPERANZA: “They don't want the new society for themselves and so they prevent the others from having it when they really want to have it.”

I: “Religious alienation, according to Christ, prevents the people from getting freedom. He tells them that they are to blame for our still having the unjust society that we have. In other words, he tells them that they are an opiate of the people.”

> *Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you rob widows of their homes and to hide this you say long prayers*.

“The widows are all the weak and unprotected. And here Jesus is talking to the capitalists. They do not only steal the widows’ houses but their land too; and above all they steal the workers’ work.”

“If somebody has a little piece of land and things go bad for him, the bank takes it. And where does it wind up? With the capitalists. And they're

often Christians and they go to Mass and say lots of prayers.”

“And in those prayers they're asking God to steal more.”

“And they go to their wealthy churches. They wouldn't come to this church because it has a dirt floor and it isn't a rich person's church.”

I: “Reading what Jesus says here, you get the impression that not only was he against people that strip the poor. He was also against people that have a lot of religious practices. It seems he didn't sympathize much with those ‘long prayers’ he talked about when he talked about the thieves.”

“There are other long prayers and they're political speeches. For example, the ones by Somoza.”

WILLIAM: “Of course there's not just religious Phariseeism; nowadays what's more pernicious is political Phariseeism. Like the Phariseeism of the United States, that's shipping orphans out of Vietnam. After they destroyed Vietnam, they're saying long prayers before the world.”

> *You travel over land and sea to convert a person to your religion and when you succeed you make that person twice as deserving of hell as you are yourselves*.

“They convert him into a mess,” said ALEJO.

“Maybe more of a gangster.”

“The result of the evangelizing of an alienated religion can be, for example, a Pinochet.”

> *Woe unto you, blind guides! You say: “Swearing by the temple doesn't count; it's swearing by the gold in the temple that counts.”*

“Even now the communion cups and the chalices are more sacred than the people, who are the temple of God.”

“Or rather, in their religion the sacred thing is gold. Or capital. According to Christ, the temple, which is the person, is what makes gold sacred. The human being is reality, and Christ calls them blind guides because they're like an opiate that makes people not see reality.”

“They distinguished between the oath that counts and the one that doesn't count; and the teaching of Jesus is that nobody must be deceived, no matter what the oath is.”

You give the tithe of mint, anise, and cumin seed, but you do not comply with the most important thing in the law: justice, mercy, and faith.

OLIVIA: “They gave the tithe of tiny little plants but they had huge crops that were stolen because they got them by exploiting other people. Like those rich people that give a dime in church.”

I said: “And here Jesus declares what is the most important thing about the law of the Bible. According to them it was the worship of God. According to Jesus it's justice, mercy, and faith. ‘Justice’ is the key word of the Bible, and we know what it is: it's the opposite of injustice, of oppression. Mercy in biblical language is the same as love or compassion: concretely it's to put yourself on the side of the poor, the orphans, the widows, the oppressed. So it's the equivalent of justice. And faith, in the Bible, is faith in justice. According to Jesus, then, the most important part of the Bible is justice, in the sense of social justice.”

You strain at the mosquito, and you swallow the camel.

“There are still people very scrupulous in religious matters who pay a lot of attention to worship, to the decoration of churches, the communion cups, and all that, and they swallow the camels, which are injustice, exploitation. Those they swallow.”

LAUREANO (whose family is evangelical): “People in the Church of the Nazarene swallow Somoza, the CIA, capitalism, the National Guard, but they don't smoke or drink.”

You clean the outside of the glass and the dish, but on the inside you are filled with what you have achieved through theft and avarice. Blind Pharisees: first clean the glass and the dish on the inside, and then you will also be clean on the outside.

“They are apparently good people but they exploit others. They are good Christians crammed with stolen goods, because all their riches are stolen goods.”

“To clean the dish on the inside would be to share whatever they have.”

I: “They had many rites of purification, and it seems as though Jesus’ image refers to that. But he doesn't tell them that their religious purification

is only *external*, and that they must have an *internal* religious purification. He tells them that the real impurity is the appropriation of other people's work."

WILLIAM: "And since what they eat and drink is stolen, they first have to clean their dishes and their glasses of those thefts. And then they'll be all clean and they won't need any rite of purification."

"People who are in the mountains or in the underground, they've cleansed themselves on the inside; maybe they look dirty on the outside, but they're completely clean on the inside."

> *They are like whitewashed tombs that on the outside look so pretty and on the inside are full of dead people's bones and all kinds of filth*.

"Gentlemen that pay their workers five dollars a week and they seem so honorable and decent. They're scrubbed and well dressed and their hands are clean, their nails are clean, but they have stolen with those hands, and blood often runs from those hands."

"You look at their pretty, pretty houses, their bright polished cars, but in back of it all are all the filth of capitalism, prostitution, hunger, beggars, all kinds of corruption and death."

I said that, according to Jewish religious legalism, a corpse was 'impure.' With this image of the tombs Jesus is referring to the deep corruption hidden beneath their political, legal, and religious structure. This structure hasn't changed much from the system of slavery to the system of capitalism. It's just that now there's more decomposition, and now there's more stink.

> *You build the tombs of the prophets and you adorn the monuments of people who were good people and you say: "If we had lived in the times of our ancestors we would not have been accomplices in the death of the prophets." You admit that you are the children of those who killed the prophets. So finish up what your parents began!*

I said I had read that in the time of Jesus many tombs were being built for the prophets that had been killed in the past. And Jesus notes a contradiction in the reactionaries: they erect tombs for martyrs and they kill martyrs. They kill the present martyrs and they erect tombs for the past

ones. And it seems there's a relation between honor for the past and the murders of the present.

WILLIAM: “Reactionaries are people who respect a past revolution and oppose it to the present one. The reactionaries of the time of Christ worshipped the Scriptures of the prophets, who were great revolutionaries; and they even wore them on their clothes. And they were ready to kill Christ, the new prophet. And so today's reactionaries can worship the Christ of those times, but they kill today's Christ. And it's because today's reactionaries are children of yesterday's reactionaries, and they're all alike.”

BOSCO: “They're a single chain. Reaction is a single thing across history. That's why Jesus says to those who want to kill him that they should finish what their ancestors began. In Nicaragua, in Chile, in many other places, they're still finishing that work.”

83.

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

(Luke 17:20–37)

The Pharisees asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come, and he answered them: "The coming of the kingdom of God is not a thing that can be seen. They are not going to say 'Here it is' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is already among you."

OLIVIA: "I don't see how they could think for so long that the kingdom of heaven was in heaven when Jesus has clearly said that it was in the midst of humankind."

REBECA: "I think the kingdom is among us already, because the kingdom is love. When we have love, there's the kingdom."

MARIITA: "I think you can't see the kingdom, because it's love. Love is in people's hearts, but it's not a visible thing that we can say here it is or there it is. But I think you can look at it: when you see the changes. The whole world is changing. And so like that you can see the kingdom of God."

LAUREANO: "The kingdom of God is inside you, but you do have to make it come true. You can have love but you have to make that love come true with the others: only then do you make the kingdom of God come true."

ALEJANDRO: "No matter how far a country has advanced in making love come true, it will never reach perfection. Then you can never say: there it is. You can always do something more."

FELIPE: "And besides we have the capitalist propaganda that always confuses you, and we can't know for sure if the kingdom of God is in a particular place or it isn't."

OLIVIA: “I'd say that you can see it: it really isn't the way people have always believed, that when Christ comes we're going to see him coming in glory in the clouds: it's going to be when we see the kingdom of love. In a country where there's justice, where there's respect for human rights and there's food and schools for everybody, there's the kingdom of love; and you can see it and notice it in a little community where we love each other and we all respect each other; it's already the kingdom of love, the kingdom of God.”

> *The time will come when you will want to see just one of the days of the Son of Man, and you won't see it. And they will say to you: “Here it is,” or “There it is.” But do not go, do not follow it. Because just as you see a lightning bolt flashing in one or another place in the sky, that's how it will be when the Son of Man comes on his day*.

ALEJANDRO: “He's saying there's going to be more changes, something more radical.”

I: “Something more radical, and it's not going to be necessary to tell you that there is Christ, that he's come, because it's going to be obvious.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that when all the people have complete justice, when they've been liberated, that's where it'll be the true kingdom, the coming of Jesus Christ will be very visible.”

MARCELINO: “It seems to me that a lot of us folks would like to see those days, to see something at least close to those days. But now it's a little different. We can see by means of the spirit, when the spirit of God enters us, we can see the days that Jesus walked, and we can see the miracles. Other than that we can't see anything, we're blind. But someday, says Jesus, it's going to be like we see a lightning bolt, it's going to be bright and clear, it's not going to be seeing just with the spirit, as I was saying. Not then; we're going to see, with our eyes, the things that are happening. Anybody that looks and sees things is going to say: it's clear.”

FELIPE: “And that part about how we shouldn't pay attention when they tell us ‘Here it is’ or ‘There it is,’ maybe it means we shouldn't pay attention to propaganda.”

MANUEL: “Then he means that that second coming that he's talking about there isn't about the end of the world, the Last Judgment, but it's…I don't understand that, then.”

I: “Here he's talking about his coming, but he's not talking about the end of the world.”

JULIO: “It seems to me that it's like when they say: ‘Here's one candidate,’ or ‘There's another one.’ Or they tell us now that the government is fair and just, and we're all getting screwed.”

MANUEL: “Well, I hadn't noticed this part of the Gospel before, because I hadn't read it. I thought they were talking about Judgment Day. But there *is* a place where they talk about Judgment Day, right?”

I: “Yes, but Jesus doesn't exactly say that will be when the world has ended. Saint Paul says the living and the dead will be judged.”

FELIPE: “If you can judge a dead person. If somebody's bad, all you can say is: ‘That bastard was no good.’”

But first he has to suffer a lot and be rejected by the people of this time.

TOMAS: “He means that the Son of Man is going to come at a time when people don't have faith in him, and they're going to say it isn't time yet.”

ELVIS: “It seems to me that the coming is the liberation of all peoples; and as for the ones that are against him: they're the reactionary people that exist and will exist when that complete change comes.”

As it happened in the times when Noah lived, so also it will happen in the days when the Son of Man comes.

ADAN: “It seems to me that when he comes, he's going to choose people. Like when in the flood all the unjust people died, and one just family was saved.”

I: “This answers the question Manuel was asking, about the end of the world. Jesus compares his coming with the flood and afterwards he compares it with the ruin of Sodom, because it will be a destruction: the destruction of the unjust. It will be a catastrophe, but not for everybody.”

On that day, if someone is on the roof, and he has his things inside the house, let him not go down to get them out; and if someone is in the country, let him not return home. Remember Lot's wife.

TOMAS: “Nobody's going to have anything, just body and soul. What you think is yours isn't yours, so why are you going to go looking for anything in your house or wherever you've got it?”

OLIVIA: “But it's not the destruction of the world he's talking about. It's when love is coming true on earth. If I have something in my house I shouldn't take it because maybe there's somebody else that needs it more than I do.”

WILLIAM: “It seems to me that it means getting rid of all your personal wealth, because the kingdom of heaven, that is, the revolution, will take good care to give each of us all that we need; then what people have to do is be concerned only about that kingdom of justice, be concerned about others, and all the rest will come by itself.”

TOMAS: “Maybe some will come out better because they leave little and get more.”

BOSCO: “And he says he mustn't look back like Lot's wife, which is looking toward the past.”

> *I say to you that on that night two will lie in the same bed; one will be taken and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding together; one will be taken and the other left behind. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left behind*.

“It seems like some are going to be left behind because they're lazy, because so many of us don't do good. We're living just to live, and maybe we think we're going to be saved without doing any struggling to make the revolution win sooner.”

ELVIS: “That choosing that he says there'll be between people, isn't that choosing between classes?”

REBECA: “The one who struggles for liberation is the one who has love, and that one will be taken to the kingdom of God and to the kingdom of love. The one who doesn't is the one who's locked up in selfishness and clinging to wealth: that one will be left behind, then.”

FELIPE: “But I don't know, Ernesto. That business about some will be taken and others left behind confuses me. It seems like it's about your fate in another world, when you're already dead or something.”

MARCELINO: “As I understand it, a person is left behind when that person is abandoned, because God's not going to be raising up some and not others;

or in other words, the one who's damned, that's the one that's going to be abandoned."

WILLIAM: "Somewhere else he says he'll set father against son and daughter against mother. Here he talks about two who are in the same bed, husband and wife; one is going to enter the kingdom and the other is going to go who knows where. And the same thing happens between the ones who are working together. It seems as though we've got the oppressor and the oppressed working together."

I: "And this is also the Last Judgment that Manuel was talking about. And we see that there is an end and a destruction, but for some and not for others."

> *On hearing this they asked him: "Where will that happen, Lord?" And he answered them: "Where the body is, there the vultures will gather."*

I: "That's a very mysterious answer of Jesus. He says that where the dead body, the corpse, is, that's where the vultures will be, what we call buzzards."

LAUREANO: "Things like that are happening now. For example, planes come to bomb and they look like vultures."

ESPERANZA: "Ernesto, the way I see it is that before a victory there's got to be many battles. Then first there's got to be that sign, the buzzards, for the slaughter. But the kingdom of God can come piece by piece, country by country, because maybe it can't all happen at once."

OSCAR: "It's not just a matter of birds flying around. There are guys fighting to free the people, and they're persecuted by the authorities: they are the vultures, because I imagine anybody persecuted by the authorities is a corpse. We're not talking about looking at birds."

BOSCO: "In Chile the buzzards are flying."

REBECA: "There's plenty of victims here too, all those who are in jail, who they've brought from Matagalpa. Up there in the north there's a lot of buzzards. So there we see the signs that Christ is coming."

LAUREANO: "Where there's injustice, that's what he says. Where there's victims."

OSCAR: "That's right, he was really the first corpse, the first victim; everybody that goes through the same thing for his cause is really him."

84.

The End of the World

(Matthew 24:1–14)

They went out of the temple. And the disciples were admiring the beauty of the temple. And Jesus said to them:

> *“Do you see all this? I tell you the truth, here no stone will be left upon stone. All will be destroyed.”*

MANUEL: “That temple wasn't the true one. The temple is the union of people, not a house where they come together.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “Of course, it didn't matter that the temple would be destroyed because that temple wasn't valuable; what was valuable was the people.”

OSCAR: “And it seems to me it was a good thing that temple would be destroyed because it was a hindrance to them, because it was a material temple. I don't know how to explain it. Because it was idolatry. They were worshiping the walls.”

ESPERANZA: “Was that temple made of stones?”

I said it was, and then she said: “And isn't it true, Ernesto, that when we admire the riches of the rich and we say how well they live, Christ is also telling us that all that will be destroyed?”

OLIVIA: “I also think those luxurious temples alienate people more. The people endure so much misery and then they are supposed to be glad when they see how pretty those temples are. Jesus is not only telling them that's going to be destroyed but that it's good for it to be destroyed, that it has no value.”

I: “He has already told the Samaritan woman that the future was going to be without temples.”

WILLIAM: “I think Jesus is seeing the destruction of the temple as a sign of a whole old system that was going to be destroyed to give way to a new system. In that temple they had all their religious ceremonies, and what Christ is telling them is something very radical, very revolutionary: that the hour has now come to put an end to all those religious ceremonies. Christians haven't understood this and they've filled the earth with temples. Jesus didn't tell them that the temple of Jerusalem had to be destroyed so that they could build temples and cathedrals everywhere.”

I: “Keeping the same ritualistic religion in those temples.”

WILLIAM: “We've got that altar, or sanctuary, in the Church of Santo Domingo in Managua, that cost 80,000 pesos.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “That's a sin. Because it's money they've taken from others. That can't be pleasing to God.”

I: “That temple that the disciples admired had been built by a tyrant, Herod I. And Jesus doesn't seem to be sorry that the temple is going to be destroyed. On the contrary: he insinuates that that's a good thing. Communists are supposed to be antireligious, but Ezekiel had seen in a vision that God himself was setting fire to the temple. And the disciples have understood something, for the Gospel says that afterwards they questioned him ‘in secret.’”

> *We want you to tell us when this is going to happen. What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the world? Then Jesus said to them: “Beware, don't let anyone deceive you. For many will come saying in my name: “I am the Christ,” and they will deceive many*.

I: “The word ‘coming’ that Matthew uses here is the Greek word ‘parusia’; that meant the triumphal arrival of an emperor. It was a political term.”

“It's those political leaders that make false promises of salvation that are the false Christs. And also the dictators, the ones who deceive peoples and exploit them.”

“Even though they don't exploit them or deceive them, even though they do good to the people, if they want to be adored like God, they also are false Christs.”

LAUREANO: “You mean Fidel Castro, because you've been reading propaganda that the Yankees are handing out.”

MARCELINO, with his calm voice: “Every false Christian is a false Christ. Because the Christian is another Christ; but the Christian who doesn't love, who exploits, is a false Christ.”

FELIPE: “But it seems to me, Ernesto, that Christ was talking especially on a worldly level: there are worldly teachings that deceive people with a false freedom, for example, the false prophecies of the capitalists, and people are left confused. They think that's the solution and meanwhile the people are starving, and meanwhile there are wars, like Christ said.”

> *You will have news of wars here and there; but do not be alarmed, for that's the way it has to be; but it is not yet the end. Because one nation will fight another, and one country will make war on another; and there will be hunger, illness, and earthquakes in many places. All this is scarcely the beginning of the pains of childbirth*.

WILLIAM: “He's talking here, it seems, on a strictly political, not religious, level. He's talking about wars of nations and social catastrophes; and like Felipe, I think the false Christs or false Messiahs are not exactly false religion in contrast to a true religion but false ideologies, false political solutions, false freedoms that humanity has been deceived about.”

I: “All that about earthquakes can also be interpreted as the tremors of society, not necessarily like the Managua earthquake (although these natural catastrophes can also have great social consequences). In general, he's saying that there'll be a lot of suffering in history before the establishing of the kingdom.”

FELIPE: “For me this is something very real, because there's talk of hunger everywhere, there's poor people everywhere, and there's also people struggling everywhere.”

I: “The horrors of the Vietnam War have just ended; before that there were two World Wars; and every day we hear of other wars, and there's news of other situations of terror and repression in other places. The interesting thing is that Jesus says ‘that's the way it has to be.’ He's saying that those contradictions are inevitable, and that there'll have to be a lot of suffering so that peoples can be free. Jesus considers this no more than a painful childbirth in history, and so he says: ‘Don't be alarmed.’”

ELVIS: “This is very important, because it's always been believed that this business about the end of the world is that the world is going to be destroyed; but it's the end of the world of exploitation. And it's really going to be a beginning.”

I: “A new heaven and a new earth.”

Then you will be put to torture, and you will be killed, and everyone will hate you because of me.

FELIPE: “He says ‘everyone,’ but I don't think he's referring to those peoples who believe in his cause.”

LAUREANO: “When he talks of the world he's referring to the capitalist world.”

I said that in the Gospel According to Saint Mark these words of Christ appear with more precision: he says that the persecutions will be in the name of “the synagogues” and “the governments.” Religious power and political power. These two powers can be repressive separately and also in alliance. And these two powers are the ones that tortured him and murdered him.

At that time many will lose faith and will hate one another and betray one another.

NOEL: “All that is being fulfilled.”

FELIPE: “All those Christians who don't believe in freedom, who believe in exploitation: they've lost their faith.”

ELVIS: “Right here in Solentiname, there are people who've stopped coming to church because they're scared of a Gospel that might get them involved. They've lost their faith. And how many more there must be like that in Nicaragua, in Central America, in the whole world.”

OLIVIA: “There are many who are very religious and they don't have faith. Those that don't want to get involved, because they believe salvation is just believing in God, those have lost their faith.”

GLORIA: “And because they lost faith is why they've lost love. They hate each other, they deceive each other, they swindle each other, they exploit each other.”

DONALD: “And those Christians without faith betray their brothers and sisters, as we've seen in Chile. They betray them, they turn them in to be

tortured and killed.”

> *Many false prophets will appear, who will deceive many people. And there will be so much iniquity that the love of many will grow cold. But the one who goes on steady to the end, that one will be saved*.

I: “The love of many will grow cold: that prophecy of Christ has been fulfilled in Christianity. Because of so much exploitation of people by each other.”

BOSCO: “And the ones who stay steady to the end are the ones who here, or in Chile, or anywhere else, stay steady until they see the coming of liberation. Like the people of Vietnam that stayed steady to the end.”

An old man who had come from the Costa Rican border: “Don't you think he's talking of a spiritual liberation?”

FELIPE: “Yes, because love is the Holy Spirit. If you love, you have the Spirit of Love. But if you're evil you'll be acting with an evil spirit. You've got to be careful about using the word ‘spiritual.’”

The old man: “Don't you think the false prophets are the evangelical preachers that want to convert people by taking their religion away from them?”

FELIPE: “They're more probably those who are preaching a spiritual love, that is, a purely spiritual kind, up in the air, without any reality.”

WILLIAM: “The false prophets are the ones that preach that all you have to do is love God. They're the ones that make people's love grow cold.”

I: “And they could just as well be Protestant evangelists as Catholic evangelists, the ones that call themselves Pentecostal.”

OLIVIA: “So when we see so much injustice we mustn't think Christ's prophecies about the kingdom have failed, because that also had been prophesied. He said it had to happen before the kingdom came.”

BOSCO: “He said those prophets would be ‘many.’ And we're seeing it. All those priests and pastors who defend the rich and preach patience because it's God's will to have poor people around.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “Not even if God was unjust.”

The visitor: “Right there in my town a young fellow became an evangelical pastor and he's been all around preaching the Gospel and now he's filthy rich.”

And this good news of the kingdom will be preached throughout the world, so that all nations may know of it, and then the end will come.

The old visitor: “I notice the Gospel is being preached everywhere. It used to be that a poor person couldn't read the Gospel because it was forbidden to read the Bible. Now the Gospel's being preached to everyone, not just to the rich but to everybody, because we're able to read the Bible and sometimes they even give it away.”

FELIPE: “But you have to keep in mind that there are two Gospels: the one preached by those liars who say they're talking in the name of God, and it's to keep the nations oppressed, and the other one, the Gospel of liberation.”

OSCAR: “And that end? That end the Gospel talks about, can it be the end of the world? What will that end be like?”

I: “Notice that it says, ‘This good news of the kingdom.’ It doesn't say the ‘Gospel,’ which is just a Greek word that means good news. Jesus isn't saying that evangelists are going to be going around everywhere handing out Bibles. He says that the good news is going to be announced to the poor. And the bad news to the rich: for if it's good for the poor it's bad for the rich. It's not the evangelists, Protestant or Catholic, that give you this news when they give you the Bible. Instead they're saying the world is never going to change and there will always be injustice. And Christ says that all the peoples will receive the news of liberation, and that will be ‘the end.’ And we're not going to receive a piece of good news so that the world will be destroyed. In Greek the same word ‘end’ is used to indicate the destruction of something or its perfecting. The end of the world that Jesus talks about is like when the work of an artist is *finished.”*

ESPERANZA: “If they were going to rouse everybody's conscience only to put an end to the world, that wouldn't make sense. It would be better to go on the way we are.”

LAUREANO: “It's the end of the United States and its representatives throughout the world.”

WILLIAM: “And we see that now all the people are receiving this news, not necessarily through the Bible.”

OSCAR: “I was asking you that because, even though they've told us a lot about the end of the world, they don't tell us that the world is going to be completed and is going to be perfect. That seemed to me very peculiar. And

I said: Well, if they're going to put an end to the world, let them end it right now, because there's no hope.”

ADAN: “What he announced that had to come first, starvation, wars, we're seeing it.”

ALEJO: “For a long time back.”

OSCAR: “It's like a woman in the pains of childbirth. If the pains are very strong it means she's going to give birth.”

WILLIAM: “It's the final pushes.”

I: “On the eve of his death, Jesus spoke again of the woman who suffers a lot when she has birth pains, but later she is so happy when her child is born.”

NATALIA, the midwife of Solentiname: “Well, you begin that suffering, and another one and another one. But you're happy. Because now you're free. Because you were oppressed. Because to go around like that is to be oppressed.”

I: “The earth is a woman who will be set free of her oppression. As Natalia says, she will be liberated.”

85.

The Coming of the Son of Man

(Matthew 24:29–36)

> As *soon as those days of suffering end, the sun will darken, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and even the heavenly forces will tremble*.

CARLOS: “Maybe with these images he's trying to tell us that the world is going to be turned upside down. That everything we've lived through up to now is going to change and it will be entirely new.”

I said I agreed with Carlos. Jesus is talking of the great changes that humanity will see, with the images of a cosmic cataclysm. At the time of the Managua earthquake lots of people believed it was the end of the world, because that's the mistaken idea of an “end of the world” that Christians have had for centuries, through having interpreted literally those apocalyptic images. Jesus isn't talking about the ruin of the world but the ruin of the status quo. And we have to keep in mind that he says that will happen immediately after the sufferings. He had previously said that humanity would have sufferings such as it never had since the beginning of the world, and that it wouldn't have them again.

WILLIAM: “I think there's not only going to be a change in humanity but also in nature. We've already seen that the world is changing a lot through people, and it will change much, much more. But above all what's going to change most is people.”

CARLOS: “And it's clear that that failing of the stars isn't the end of the world, since in the next verse Jesus says that after that all the nations will see his coming. So there will still be people.”

Then in the sky will be seen the sign of the Son of Man, and all the nations of the earth will weep, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of the sky with great power and glory.

I said that Jesus never gave himself the title of Messiah; when he talked about himself he called himself the Son of Man. In Hebrew and Aramaic the Son of Man means simply “the Man,” but that's also the name that is given in the Book of Daniel to one sent by God who comes to defeat the empires of the earth that seem to be “beasts.” Against the “beasts” is set up someone “with a likeness of man,” that is, with a *human face*. Man in the Bible is the image of God, and from that comes the proscription of having other images; and Ezekiel describes the glory of God as a “likeness of man.” It seems also that Jesus didn't want to give himself the name of Messiah because to the Jews of his time the Messiah was a leader with political power; on the other hand, in the Book of Daniel the Son of Man is one who defeats the beasts of political power.

FELIPE: “It seems to me that the Son of Man or Man will gradually appear to the peoples as the struggle for liberation advances. The more the revolution advances, the more Jesus is going to appear. The cataclysms, as you were saying, are the evil society that's slowly destroying itself, and it's then that Jesus begins to appear.”

“In the proletariat, in the poor.”

DONALD: “He says the nations of the earth are going to weep. It seems to me that if everything is just as always and suddenly there's a change in everything, let's say it's the revolution, then the capitalists are going to weep and shout and rage because they're going to get screwed. It seems to me that's the way it'll be, right?”

I: “The prophets had spoken of that weeping that the nations will do, that is, the governments, but they had also described it as a weeping of conversion. The weeping that Jesus speaks of can be understood that way, and some translations of the Bible say that ‘all the nations will beat their breasts.’”

PANCHO: “I think what we're reading here can be understood according to each one's ideas; you understand it this way because you have communist or socialist ideas, as you call them; but others will understand it another way, and I don't know which side to be on, yours or the other.”

FELIPE: “But it's by means of analysis that we can understand the Gospel; if we start reading things without analyzing them we don't understand anything.”

PANCHO: “It's because you're talking about a material reality and we have an immortal soul.”

I: “We have an immortal soul and an immortal body also. According to Christ our body is going to be resurrected.”

FELIPE: “I think so, too, Ernesto: the ones who save their bodies have saved their souls, but the ones who lose their bodies will also lose their souls.”

PANCHO: “But what about a person who doesn't believe in the soul?”

I: “What does it matter if someone believes only in material things if material things are going to be resurrected?”

FELIPE: “If they don't intend to be resurrected that's no problem because if they're going to be resurrected they're resurrected even though they don't intend to be.”

ELVIS: “It seems to me that resurrection is to be alive in the people.”

PANCHO: “Really, some poor guy dies and that's it, bang, and we're left remembering him! But he's done for. He lives in the hearts of the people, but that's not the way you want to live. You want to feel yourself really with others, to breathe the air others are breathing.”

OLIVIA: “It depends on the way he died; because if he was somebody that never did anything then he's completely dead, but if he's somebody who identified with the people he's always with us. It's like if Ernesto dies, to us he doesn't die, to us he's always alive.”

I: “I shall be breathing with you; I'll be breathing the air that the people breathe. Here Jesus says that all the peoples will see ‘the sign of the Son of Man.’ In another Gospel he said that the only sign or miracle that he would make would be ‘the sign of Jonah,’ who was in the belly of the whale and came out alive. So that sign is resurrection.”

> *And he will send his angels so that with loud trumpet blasts they may gather his chosen ones from the four winds, from one end of the world to the other*.

FELIPE: “I think the people were confused thinking that Christ was going to gather his chosen ones to take them to another world, or rather, to

heaven, and it's just the opposite: it's to get them to be active in this world, to carry out with them the liberation of the peoples.”

I: “‘Angel’ in the Bible means messenger; as God has messengers, the Son of Man also has messengers and with them he will gather his chosen ones; so we see that the world is not being destroyed.”

ELVIS: “What's going to be destroyed is the capitalist system. There's going to be destruction, but not of the earth. That's what the people have understood as a rain of fire and all those things.”

MANUEL: “But hadn't Jesus said earlier that there were few chosen ones? But here he talks about a lot of them, that they come from everywhere, from the four winds.”

WILLIAM: “We have to look at the context. Before, he was talking about his own coming, and he was talking to the Jews, telling them that among them there were few chosen. Other times, talking of the end he gives the example of the wheat and the straw, or the good and bad fishes, and he makes it seem that the chosen ones are very numerous. Now, talking about his second coming he presents the gathering of the chosen ones as a great world event.”

GUSTAVO: “And that trumpet blast, it seems to me it's like: ‘Proletarians of the world, unite.’”

IVAN: “And I think there'll be lots of them because the dead are also going to be chosen, the ones who haven't died, who are living as we've said here; like in the case of Che, and of all the martyrs, all the ones who have sacrificed themselves for the people.”

I: “The prophets had talked a lot about the fact that in the messianic era there would be gathered all the oppressed Jews who were scattered throughout the world and who would come from the four winds. Jesus refers to that meeting, but now it's not only for the Jews but for the oppressed from all over the world. The trumpet is an image that he also takes from the Old Testament. God's interventions in history are like the sounding of trumpets. The prophets, when they announce the fall of the great empires of the enemies, speak of trumpets. Isaiah says that a trumpet will summon all the peoples when the Assyrian kingdom is crushed. So the trumpet is the call to liberation. And Saint Paul makes it clear that there will be several trumpet blasts or different liberations, for he says that ‘with the last trumpet sound the dead will be resurrected.’”

Learn this example from the fig tree: when its branches are tender and the leaves sprout, you know that summer is coming. In the same way, when you see all this, know that the end is near, at the door.

FELIX MAYORGA: “Well, the fact is that the coming of Christ is known. He says that when the fig tree has its sprouts, you notice that it's summer, hot, right? Then, when we all love each other, we'll know that Christ is coming.”

LAUREANO: “We're all seeing sprouts now. Cuba can be a sprout. China, another one.”

I: “And besides there are other sproutings in different parts of the world. Even in Nicaragua there are those sprouts.”

MANUEL: “It's beginning to sprout, as Laureano says, when people are struggling for justice.”

CARLOS: “I think there have always been people who've struggled for justice, but now it's different, now they're beginning to form groups everywhere, little communities that are already announcing the kingdom of God. And it's very moving to see how these groups are enormously alike without knowing each other.

BOSCO: “Through those sprouts of freedom that are all over the earth, we know that the end is arriving.”

FELIPE: “Those sprouts come from the people; and they come especially from young people: with young people humanity is renewing itself everywhere. Maybe that's why Jesus talks about branches that are tender.”

OLIVIA: “He says that ‘the branches are tender and the leaves sprout.’ The leaves sprout because earlier the leaves have fallen. That's how young people renew the ideas of other generations that have died, that apparently have died. The fig tree had dropped its leaves, it was stripped, but inside it had living sap. In youth you see that life sprout that's the life of the leaves that have died; then those leaves revive in other new sproutings.”

I: “Young people in different parts of the world are having the same ideas that we have among the young people here in Solentiname. Those are the signs, says Christ. And he gives the example of a fig tree, a plant that bears fruit. Therefore it's not about the destruction of humanity but about its maturing. And that maturing is love: the image of the fig tree is taken from the Song of Songs, where the lover tells the beloved to rise, for the winter is over, that the rains have stopped, and the flowers appear, the time for

singing has come, the cooing of the turtle dove is heard, and the sprouts of the fig tree are blossoming."

> *I tell you the truth, that all this will happen before the people of this generation die. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*.

I: "These words of Christ are the most mysterious in the Gospel. Could it be that Christ was wrong? Many Bible experts don't know how to interpret this. But I believe that in the Bible there's nothing that the people can't understand."

ADANCITO: "Maybe there was already beginning to be a change in those people, just a few of them."

CARLOS: "In the times of the apostles there were already communities starting where they had everything in common, where they lived with love. Those young shoots were already beginning."

I: "Or perhaps that the end of the world, which we've said is the end of the system of injustice, according to Christ was already beginning from that time. So we're in the end of the world, and we have already been in it for some time."

OSCAR: "I think we're already seeing that, injustice is being destroyed. We're seeing those changes in lots of places, and the world will have to change. That's what Jesus meant there, the victory over injustice."

MANUEL: "It may be that he meant: 'before the people in this capitalist society die.' Because in those times there was capitalism."

I: "There was exploitation although with another name. And Manuel may be right. It has been observed that the word 'generation,' in the mouth of Jesus, always has the meaning of evil people. Elsewhere he talks of 'this perverse and adulterous generation.'"

OLIVIA: "It seems to me also that as he was the first to suffer and the first liberator, the first one sacrificed for what was to come, then the people were already seeing the beginning of the liberation that he was announcing, because they were seeing his death."

ELVIS: "It seems to me that he was referring to the empire that existed at that time. Soon afterwards, I believe, came the destruction of Jerusalem. So I believe he was referring to those things."

MANUEL: “But then this part wouldn't be valid right now; if he'd said it for that time it would have no validity at the present time because it would be all over.”

LAUREANO: “It's because it's being fulfilled part by part.”

MANUEL: “Jerusalem was destroyed but capitalism is still in existence.”

I: “I think, as Oscar says, that we're seeing the end of injustice. And to those who were listening to him Jesus was probably saying that they were already beginning to see that which we now see more clearly. A few blossoms on the fig tree were beginning to be seen. And, as Olivia says, with his death, that is, with his resurrection, liberation was beginning to be seen. And also, as Elvis says, this was the fall of the empires: the fall of the empires was beginning and the end of the world was beginning and now we're fully into it.”

ELVIS: “Now we're seeing the fall of capitalism. We're right in the process.”

WILLIAM: “Every process has transformations. And every process begins with something very small. So the baby develops slowly in it's mother's belly, and then it's born and goes on developing until it gets to be grown-up. And so too the kingdom of liberation was already a fetus from that time on, and was developing.”

OSCAR: “I'm intrigued, Ernesto, by these words ‘heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away’; it seems to me that Jesus there is talking about a destruction: maybe capitalism and the things that treat us badly, I don't know if he's going to destroy heaven and earth too.”

I: “If heaven and earth were going to be destroyed, how then would his word be fulfilled?”

ELVIS: “So it would be useless, the struggle of so many countries and so many people: to struggle just to die.”

I: “His word *will* be fulfilled, Jesus says; and his word is the liberation of the oppressed and the triumph of the poor.”

> *But as for the day and the hour, no one knows, not even the very angels in heaven, not even the Son, only the Father knows*.

LAUREANO: “That's what I believe. Yes, the day and the hour when we're going to establish a kingdom of justice here, we don't know it. Maybe

tomorrow, maybe within a year, maybe within ten years. But let's hope it's soon, because we don't want this any more."

PANCHO: "It seems to me that Jesus knew it, but it didn't suit him to tell the people."

OLIVIA: "I think he said that because it was taking so long to raise the consciousness of humanity; he couldn't be sure of anything because he didn't know how the process of humanity was going to be. Because if in a small community like here we're not all conscious, how must it be with all of humanity! That's why he couldn't be sure."

WILLIAM: "Because it's not one day or one hour, it's an infinite number of days and hours, because in each community or each group that becomes conscious, there the day and the hour have arrived; but in others it hasn't happened yet, who knows when it'll come."

I: "It's true that it depends on the will of people. There are people who hasten liberation, the coming of the kingdom; there are others who oppose it and delay it."

OSCAR: "Ernesto, I think Christ says that, about not even the Son knowing, because he really didn't know, because he was born like us. If he'd known, he'd have told the secret to his brothers and sisters, and we'd know it on earth and we wouldn't have started waiting. But what we've got to do on earth isn't waiting but struggling."

I: "This reminds me of what Marx said: You couldn't know when perfect communism was going to be established. But that scientifically you could know it had to be established, since nature and history tended toward that."

LAUREANO: "Well, if you know when liberation is going to come, if you know that it's even inside of twenty years: why should you be screwing around?"

I said that a Jesuit, Father Jon Sobrino, has written that Jesus not only didn't know when the kingdom would come (as he says) but besides he was expecting it to come very soon (with an impatience like that of young Laureano). As the kingdom has been delayed all these centuries, we Christians of today are in a different situation from the situation of Jesus. And therefore, he says, we have to make social and political analyses that Jesus didn't make, and following Jesus can't be just blind imitation of Jesus.

MANUEL: "He says we must be vigilant because he'll come like a thief in the night. It seems to me we ought to be getting used right now to the new system, so we won't be surprised. Like what happened in Cuba. Some

people, since they didn't know anything about revolution or have any love, they suffered terribly when that change came. They must have felt oppressed because they didn't understand, they weren't prepared. For them the change came like a thief to rob them.”

OSCAR: “I think it's going to be soon, here in Nicaragua. It's a triumph that's coming, because all the young people in the country are going to be united against capitalism, and then when they catch on, it'll be too late.”

I: “That's the triumph of love, everybody being united, as Oscar says; and that's also the triumph over death, the resurrection that Pancho was talking about earlier. The Son of Man, resurrected, is coming to bring resurrection to all his body, which is all of humanity.”

86.

The Wise Virgins

(Matthew 25:1–13)

We commented on the Gospel in the hut, after a lunch of fried fish, tortillas, and an onion salad that Natalia brought.

The kingdom of heaven is like ten girls that came to bring light to a wedding with their lamps, some with enough oil, others without enough.

> *As the bridegroom delayed in coming, they all got sleepy, and they finally went to sleep*.

"This parable refers to the marriage of God with the people. The bridegroom that humanity will have is true love, which is God. But when we say that God is love, we don't mean it's any old love, like the love of a couple, that can be selfish. That love means there won't be any more injustice on earth. That love is the revolution."

I said that a Latin American theologian (Padre Juan Luis Segundo) says that the word "kingdom" that Jesus used was at that time as explosive as the word "revolution" is today.

"It seems that those girls got tired of waiting and fell asleep. Maybe you can get tired of waiting for the kingdom of love and you say: 'well, it's late in coming,' and you stop waiting for that kingdom."

I said it seemed to me that this parable is addressed especially to Christians. For two thousand years they'd been announcing the coming of the kingdom, and it seemed it was coming at any moment. And it hasn't come yet. It seems as though it's never going to come. The parable says that they all got sleepy and fell asleep. And so it has happened in history:

Christianity didn't even go on waiting for that kingdom. But in the parable the girls weren't reproached for having fallen asleep. It seems that, since the bridegroom didn't come, there was nothing to do but go to sleep. What it says is that some had a good supply of oil, and others didn't.

“Take us here in Solentiname: Some are selfish, individualists; others are real comrades, who have love. Some are not going to be prepared when socialism comes, a society of equals, where we'll all be alike. The others are going to be prepared, they're ready right now because they have a community spirit.”

“At first I couldn't make any sense out of this parable, but now I see it has a lot to do with our community. Some are negative, you'll never be able to do anything with them. Others are passive too, maybe they went to sleep for a while, but they're prepared. It seems that the revolution isn't coming, but it'll soon be here, and the ones that aren't ready'll be screwed.”

Then at about midnight, a shout was heard: “Here comes the bridegroom! Go out to receive him!”

ESPERANZA: “It seems like the change is going to be sudden, and very quick, right?”

FELIPE: “At midnight, when it was dark, and quiet, and they were sleepy.”

JULIO: “They all began by having oil. That oil is love. The ones that ran out of oil are the Christians that don't have enough love, right? They had some at first, but they didn't have enough for such a long wait.”

OSCAR: “Those ten girls are all of us, and just as in that example there were five and five, so also among Christians there are some on the side of justice and others not. And when the bridegroom comes, the ones on the side of injustice are going to look for love right then, but it'll be too late.”

OLIVIA: “It'll be too late to look for it, because love can't be learned in a day, you learn love all your life, and you teach it to your children, or else you teach your children selfishness. And people that have grown up with a selfish mentality and that belong to a society that's all selfish, how are they going to change suddenly?”

And the thoughtless ones said to the thoughtful ones: “Give us a little of your oil, because our lamps are going out.” But the thoughtful

ones said. “No, because then there won't be enough for us or for you. You'd better go and buy some.”

“There are many that always take advantage of other people's work, and those guys, when the kingdom comes, they won't have anything prepared for that kingdom, and when they see that now everything is happening, they're going to want to take advantage of what the others have achieved. And they'll say: ‘Well, can we come in now?’ And they won't let them come in. Jesus is telling us we mustn't wait for others to do things, for other people to establish justice and love on earth.”

“And I see here, too, that you can't share solidarity with the selfish because then there won't be enough solidarity for everybody. In a revolutionary society the selfish have to be excluded.”

While they were going to buy it, the bridegroom came, and the girls who were prepared went in to the wedding with him and the door was closed.

“Oil gives light and joy, and that's the way love is. Each person is a lamp, but a person without love is a lamp that's gone out.”

“He means that that error, not being ready for the kingdom, is not going to be forgiven. Those girls had the doors closed on them, they weren't forgiven.”

“It's clear that the kingdom won't be for everyone. Five were left and five weren't.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “Those young ladies that didn't have much fuel didn't go to buy the oil sooner, earlier in the night. If they had time to go, why didn't they go sooner and not wait until the bridegroom came! It's a good thing they closed the door on them.”

I: “I suppose that when all of humanity loves one another, then we'll have the wedding of humanity with God, which is love: the marriage of God with the people, as it has been said here. But this parable also makes us see that inhumanity there are those who love and those who do not love, those who unite humankind and those who divide humankind. Some enter and the others stay outside, and the door closes.”

FELIPE: “The ones who don't get in are the exploiters, who want to keep us apart.”

LAUREANO: “There are guys who've been revolutionaries before, and have even been in a war, and they've lost their spirit. And now again there's warfare in Nicaragua, and all they're interested in is making dough. It seems to me that those guys also ran out of lamp oil.”

“The Gospel gives the example of some girls, and maybe that's because this applies mainly to young people: the young people of humanity that keep the oil coming, and the young people that don't have any more.”

OLIVIA: “The Gospel's for everybody, old and young. We've all got to keep our hope alive, like young people.”

ALEJANDRO: “That's why an irresponsible young person is unforgivable.”

OSCAR: “The young people whose oil runs out are like they're old. Their flame is gone, their love is gone. They didn't have enough love for other people. Their oil runs out, and without oil there's no light. There's no light for the feast.”

Be wakeful, for you don't know the day or the hour when the Son of Man will come.

ESPERANZA: “He means that the change can come at any moment.”

I: “It's going to be a surprise, according to this, and when least expected. These words are encouraging, so that we won't lose hope thinking that the kingdom never came.”

OLIVIA: “When they talk about these things, especially among us simple people, about how we don't know the day or the hour when Christ is going to come, all they think of is more praying, more obeying of religious rules. They don't think of the revolution, and that's like being asleep, because this religion puts people asleep. And Christ tells us, on the contrary, to be awake, with our consciences wide awake.”

“And a lot of people are afraid of that day. When that Managua earthquake came, lots of people thought it was the Last Judgment. And Jesus says it's going to be like a feast.”

OSCAR: “It's a great joy, man! In a feast we all get together and we share everything that's there, and we all take part in all the talking and we're all happy; you're full of joy. And when we're all together here, you feel happy, you feel a joy, it's a kingdom that we're all sharing in, it's a little like, like the coming of the bridegroom, I'd say.”

I: “The gathering has to be of everyone, and that's why the resurrection is needed. All those that have died will also share in that joy, provided they lived with their lamp oil ready.”

LAUREANO: “Now only a few people can afford to have big feasts, with whiskey and fancy things.”

I: “Christ said specifically that the rich would be excluded from that kingdom.”

LAUREANO: “That's because we're going to close the doors on them.”

OLIVIA: “It won't be a feast like those feasts; it'll be more like the feast there is when in a country every single one eats and every single one has medicine and every single one has clothes. If it was like that here, all Solentiname would be a feast, and all Nicaragua would be a feast because there's going to be love, and because there's going to be everything for everybody. And it's pretty much like that kind of a feast that the kingdom of heaven will be.”

OSCAR: “Look: when a rich bastard has a feast, the poor people can't share. But when the people have a feast it's a joy for everybody and even the rich can share in it. It seems to me it'll be like that, like the people's feasts, the one that God offers in the kingdom.”

I: “But the humanity that has already died has to share also in that feast; otherwise it would be a very exclusive and very unfair feast, like those of the rich. We'll all have to be alive, resurrected, in that new humanity, and it'll be a humanity that's going to die, because this is the wedding of humanity with God, who is love, the very fountain of life. I've wondered about one thing: why does the bridegroom of this parable get to the feast so late? The appointed time must have been earlier, since the girls who were waiting for him fell asleep. I think it must have been because the feast, for some reason, was delayed. This seems to be trying to tell us that the marriage of God and the people has also had a delay in history. We don't know why, and it will take place later than it was programmed. And that's why we're still in the darkness of the night, sleepy, hungry, cold, waiting for the bride and groom to arrive and for the feast to begin.”

87.

The Talents

(Matthew 25:14–30)

The kingdom of heaven is like a rich man that took a long trip and left one servant five talents (about 100,000 pesos), another two, and another one, so they could invest them. On his return the one that received five talents gave back ten to him, the one that received two gave back four. But the one that received one talent said to him:

> *“Sir, I knew you were a hard man who harvests where you didn't sow and gathers where you have scattered no grain. For that reason I was afraid and I hid your money in the ground. But I give you back what is yours.” The master answered him: “Evil and lazy servant, so you knew I harvest where I didn't sow, and I gather where I've scattered no grain? Therefore you should have put my money in the bank, and when I returned you would have given it back with interest.”*

WILLIAM: “That's a lousy parable.”

I: “Why is it lousy, William?”

WILLIAM: “Because it's about speculating with money: something we all condemn, like putting money out at interest; giving the money to others so they can work and work with it and hand over the profits to the owner of the money.”

I: “It's really a very ugly example that Jesus gives of exploitation, of speculation with money, of pure capitalism.”

ADAN: “Well, he probably didn't say it. Who knows who said it.”

OSCAR: “He talks of the kingdom of heaven or of God, and he says we must all struggle, and that's why he gives the example of the money. But it's really kind of ugly too.”

WILLIAM: “Maybe it's what those people could understand best.”

FELIPE: “Like here among ourselves we give examples of hens and corn and kidney beans, which are the things we understand best, so it'll be seen clearer, in the people's words. Well that's the way Jesus was talking too. But there he was probably talking to another kind of people, people very stuck on money, and then he talks to them of the kingdom of heaven with the example of a money lender.”

WILLIAM: “Who knows? It doesn't say here who he was talking to.”

OLIVIA: “To the apostles and to us.”

WILLIAM: “In this instance, I mean.”

OLIVIA: “In this instance he's talking to us too. He's talking here about a work that he's left to us, not to one but to many, and we'll all have to account for what we do for others. It's much more to do a thing in common than to make money, because if you work for a community or a country, well then it's capital that's being produced: being conscientious, seeing that the wealth is distributed, that there's medicine for everyone, in short, it's a lot of capital that's being distributed. And that obligation isn't just for one or two or three of us but for every one of us, until we act in accordance with that Gospel, with that very Gospel, all of us.”

OSCAR: “Man, money's what we condemn, but it's only when you earn it by abusing your sister or brother. When you give it, not take it away, you shouldn't be cursed or condemned.”

WILLIAM: “Well, I don't know. Besides, the example is lousier because of what the servant says who hid the money: that he was a hard master, that he gathered where he hadn't put anything, that he harvested and didn't sow.”

TERESITA, his wife: “At that time there were only masters and servants, right? He had to talk like that so they'd understand. At that time all the servants had to be working with the master's talents or money, and that's why he had to give that example.”

I: “He was seeing the exploitation there was in the society of his time, and that's going on now—much worse with the banks and finances of today.”

WILLIAM: “There's the bank, there's a bank there!”

I: “And it's a condemnation of this system. He says that's the way the kingdom of heaven is, only the opposite: the rich man that devotes himself just to multiply his money is like the man that buried the talent he'd been given and didn't make it produce. Because money is to be given, it's not to be put away; nor is it to be multiplied, because that's not doing anything with it.”

PANCHO: “It seems to me this is clearly spiritual. You always refer every passage of the Gospel to the rich and the exploiters and money, but here Jesus is talking of money only in the form of a parable and he isn't referring to money: these coins or talents are the wisdom that God gives. Some people may have received a lot of it, like the talents of an engineer, a lawyer.”

FELIPE: “That wisdom that you mention and money amount to the same thing: money brings that wisdom, and the wisdom brings money.”

A girl asked Pancho: “Somebody who's received a lot of money, a millionaire, what should he do with his money?”

PANCHO: “Not try to steal, pay fair salaries.”

ELVIS: “That would be to keep the money buried and not multiply it; to multiply it would be to give it to the people, to the people that it's been taken from, for it used to belong to the people. So to return it in his case would be to make good use of the money.”

PANCHO: “That would be a person who maybe has stolen. Many can make money with their work, earning just profits.”

ADAN, his brother: “What happens is that when you've got it, even though you earned it easy, that money's already being used to exploit. Any deal you make is exploitation because it's with somebody else's labor.”

OSCAR: “I see that that man had to go away, and he wanted his money to increase, the way he saw it. And he looked for others who were exploiters like him, and he gave them money so they'd exploit the people and earn more and get double what he was leaving them. So they were all equal as exploiters. They were exploiting the people. But the guy that didn't get much, one talent, he didn't cooperate with them. He was conscientious, because he didn't have the strength to exploit his brothers and sisters. That's the way I understand it. Then the boss got sore when he comes and hands back the same as what he'd been given. We've got to work, we can't goof off, but we're not going to exploit like those were doing.”

LAUREANO: “But it's a parable, man, it's got a different meaning.”

PANCHO: “Well, it's because the word of God is a word of wisdom, and Jesus never made a mistake in giving these examples. And if we begin to think of ‘exploitation,’ ‘the rich man,’ ‘who is robbing the poor man’ and all that (that's all we have on our minds), then we don't understand the example. He wasn't talking about those things. Well, now, there's others that hide behind the Bible to rob all of humanity. And Christ didn't want to tell them that; he wanted to show them what was spiritual, the word of God.”

I: “See, Oscar, here Christ gives the example of an exploiter, and his employees were exploiters too; and he wants them to multiply his money. And Christ says that's the way God acts with us.”

OSCAR: “Oh, well, what God wants *us* to multiply is love!”

MYRIAM: “Love is what God has given to all of us, in different quantities.”

OSCAR: “I see it now: the ones that have loved humanity a lot have also received a lot of love, and they duplicated it.”

GLORIA: “Some have received more and others less, but everybody ought to double what they have.”

OLIVIA, her mother: “The one who's practiced justice, which is the same as love, is the one who's multiplied. The other one, the one that didn't do anything, is the egotist. The parable doesn't tell that some folks received money to increase money: it's us; the money is us. It tells that you have to give up what you have and work for others.”

DOÑA ADELITA, a little old lady with a very faint voice: “That's the business. The one that has done the most good works has done the most business.”

OSCAR: “That's what this Gospel's saying, but maybe the rich don't understand it, and then what they do is screw you. They start to argue with you, hell, a poor jerk that doesn't understand.”

I: “In Cuba they call workers that have cut a lot of sugarcane for the people millionaire cutters; they're millionaires not in money but in service and work. And that's the kind of capitalists and millionaires that Christ says we must be in the kingdom of heaven. Don't you think that's the way it ought to be interpreted?”

FELIPE: “And those are the accounts he keeps. And he says he's going to be tough in keeping accounts. The guy that didn't produce anything, it seems to me, he can be the religious man who just begins praying and singing junk and he hasn't done anything for the good of the world. And

he's afraid to get mixed up in the revolution because he thinks it'll turn out bad, that maybe it's a sin."

I: "Christ says that just as exploiters multiply money, so we revolutionaries must multiply love."

WILLIAM: "And love is money; love is also wealth well distributed: the two things are related."

I: "And money would be good, as Oscar says, then, if we use it as we ought to, distribute it, and then that's the way love is multiplied."

LAUREANO: "As I see it the kingdom is society and the ones that have received most are the ones that have the most responsibilities. In the case of Cuba, for instance, Fidel is multiplying the talent well. Here it's just the opposite, because here the government may be busy multiplying the talents, but not for the people, so not for the kingdom."

"The situation here is worse than the man in the parable. That guy was condemned because he didn't use the talent that he'd been given: he didn't do good, he didn't do evil. These guys use all the resources, but they use them for evil."

FELIPE: "He gives the example of a guy that buried his money, because that's what the capitalists do with capital. They're like that one that didn't use it even for himself or for anybody; he just put it away."

"In society there are people who have big jobs, and they multiply, but they don't share it. Maybe they have love just among themselves, but they don't share it with the people. In Cuba, Fidel, *he* multiplies and shares it."

LAUREANO: "It's working for others. He calls him there just a master; a master can be all of society."

I: "But that master is also God who has given humanity all the riches of the earth to multiply. To multiply for him, for love, which is the same as saying, as Laureano says, for all of society. And he's going to be a hard man when he asks for an accounting."

WILLIAM: "But the bad servant accuses him of harvesting where he didn't sow. It's a terrible image; he makes him out a monster."

I: "As the miser is relentless in demanding his money, God is relentless with love."

WILLIAM: "As a matter of fact, if he asks for an accounting it's because love sowed it. Perhaps that one didn't realize what had been sown, and that's why he says that."

TERESITA: “That's an excuse by the servant who didn't do anything. People who don't do anything for other people always have that excuse: that love is very hard.”

FELIPE: “Freedom, love, for the exploiter is a monster.”

And he said: “Take away his talent, and give it to the one who has ten. Because the one who has will be given more and will have extra; but the one who has nothing will lose what little he has.”

I: “Isn't that unfair?”

LAUREANO: “If it was money, sure.”

PANCHO: “That's what I'm saying! He wasn't talking in material terms, he was talking in spiritual terms. Because it wouldn't be fair for me to take away from a guy that has only ten pesos and give them to a guy that has ten thousand. That wouldn't be fair; Christ didn't say that. And yet the rich exploiter reasons that way.”

I: “That's what happens with money. Those who have the most earn most and those who have little lose even the little they have. Capitalism makes the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The bank takes away your lands or forces you to sell when you can't pay the bank. But the same bank loans to the big landowners so they can buy those lands. Just as now many in Solentiname are having to sell their small properties to the great landholding company that's interfering here. Christ says the same thing will happen in the kingdom of heaven, with love.”

OSCAR: “I agree. The guy that's selfish, don't let him have anything, because he's not doing anything, he just lives for himself. There he's talking about the ones that are selfish. The guy that just lives for himself. He doesn't love even himself because he doesn't mind losing his soul.”

I: “Those who have the most love will become richer and those who have very little are going to be left poorer, says Christ.”

OSCAR: “In that sense the thing is fine, because it's okay to take from a guy that only has a little and give it to someone that's deserving. But the truth is that this Gospel is a little involved with the question of money.”

I: “He gives the example of capitalistic exploitation to make us see that the same thing happens with love as with money. But as I say, it's the reverse because the one that has money and keeps it selfishly is the one that has no love.”

TOMAS: “He has love, but it's love for money.”

OSCAR: “See, Ernesto, it's all clear here, all that you're saying, but notice, I find that in lots of people, you know, the Gospel is very fashionable, everybody reads the Bible now; if unfortunately somebody comes along who is quite, let's say, interested in money, and unfortunately he starts to read this Gospel, and understands it in his own way, these words are going to make him worse than before.”

FELIPE: “Well, he couldn't be stupid enough not to notice that it's an example.”

OSCAR: “Well, if they understood it there wouldn't be any rich people.”

FELIPE: “Well, rich people don't even notice things like that.”

OSCAR: “Well, I'm saying then, that if unfortunately they read it there, they think it's a defense of them.”

LAUREANO: “But don't they see that this isn't being said for them but for us? Doesn't it say that you have to give to the one that has? And the rich man, what does he have? Why the money doesn't belong to him, it belongs to all of you.”

ALEJO: “Of course, this example is one of money that's been given and that doesn't belong to them. They're supposed to multiply it and give it back multiplied. It's not for them to sit on it.”

LAUREANO: “Well, in another Gospel it says it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. And if he's making them rich it's so they won't be saved.”

OSCAR: “I think it's clear up to a point, even an ignorant guy can understand it, because he's talking directly. But the other idea is a little more confused so it's difficult for us to solve the problem.”

I: “The command that God gave to man and woman when God created them was: grow and multiply. That's the law of love: be fruitful and multiply. It is proper to life to multiply oneself.”

WILLIAM: “What's unnatural is for money to multiply itself, creating more money all by itself.”

I: “And God doesn't want us to give him back nature just as we've received it; we must give it back to him re-created and transformed. And finally we see that anyone who won't take risks in order to change the world is condemned to solitude, is separated from humanity.”

And that useless servant, throw him into outer darkness, where he will weep and gnash his teeth.

OSCAR: “That's the one who has no love even for himself.”

TOMAS: “The weeping is from fury, and he gnashes his teeth because he's furious.”

OSCAR: “Maybe he's a criminal, a murderer that will kill us all. We've got to get rid of him.”

88.

The Last Judgment

(Matthew 25:31–46)

When the Son of Man comes as king, surrounded by all his angels, he will sit on his throne of glory. People from all nations will gather before him, and he will separate them some from others, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

I: “I've just come from Managua, where I was summoned, as you know, to be interrogated by the Military Court that is investigating the activities of the FSLN [Sandinista National Liberation Front], and there I quoted to the judges this very passage, telling them that in the end God was going to judge everyone. But now that we have read the text I realize that Jesus doesn't say that God is going to judge but that he himself is going to judge.”

FELIPE: “He says it will be when he comes as king, that is, when the kingdom is established, and since we know that the kingdom will be here on earth, the judgment will then be here on earth.”

WILLIAM: “And it's not that he's going to come on a cloud; you mustn't take this literally; it's society itself that he's going to judge.”

ALEJANDRO: “And the judgment consists in a selection from society, a separation of the good and the evil.”

WILLIAM: “It's a selection that in fact is already going on, whenever a people becomes free. The evil ones leave and the ones that want to work for others and build the new society, they stay there.”

I told them what I heard in Cuba from my friend the Catholic writer, Fina Garcia Marruz: when the Revolution triumphed it was like being at the Last Judgment, for everything that had been secret came out into the light

and you found out who had been with the people and who had been against the people and you rewarded some and punished others. And I said that the Judgment begins right now, as the Resurrection also, according to Christ, begins right now. But the complete Judgment, of “all the nations” as it says here, will not come until the kingdom is established on all the earth. And it seems to me that the Son of Man will not come as an individual, as he did the first time; he will be a collective Christ, he will come as a society, or rather a new species, the New Person. Father Chardin says that just as for the first coming of Christ it was necessary for the individual human being to have reached a certain degree of evolution, for his second coming it's going to be necessary for all of society to have reached a certain special degree of evolution.

FELIPE: “Let's say the people will be king.”

> *Then the king will say to those on his right hand: “Come, you blessed by my Father; receive the kingdom prepared for you since God made the world. For I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I wandered as a foreigner and you sheltered me. I lacked clothing and you gave it to me; I was ill and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to see me.”*

WILLIAM: “Those who are on his right are the left for us. Those who are on his left, that he later curses, are the right.”

ALEJANDRO: “There's the danger that the things that Christ names here will be understood as simple traditional charity, and I don't think that's the meaning.”

GIGI, our friend from Peru: “At times in an unjust system there's been no alternative to that traditional charity. It's clear that authentic Christian charity is collectivized charity: a whole system where injustice no longer exists. Both of them are charity, but the latter is already the beginning of the kingdom.”

I: “I also believe that we can't distinguish between charity and revolution, for they're the same thing. Camilo Torres used to say that revolution is *effective* charity. And he explained it by saying that only with it could there be effective carrying out of works of mercy in society as a whole: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, etc. In the past the saints, when a just society wasn't possible

because of the means of production that were then in force (slavery, feudalism, or capitalism), what they did was to practice charity individually or through a small group: a religious society that they founded. But now Camilo Torres' effective charity is possible."

WILLIAM: "In Cuba everybody's been fed and given clothing, adequate housing, medical care, education. I think that when Christ spoke of these things, which are a person's basic necessities and the first ones that have to be considered, he was thinking, more than of traditional charity, of revolutionary charity: effective charity."

GIGI: "Yes, maybe he was talking for history and for the present instead of for people of his own time. Before, you couldn't do anything except what Francis of Assisi did. That was the maximum effectiveness; now there are other possibilities. One very important thing that I find in this Gospel is that it's an announcement of the definitive triumph of love, of justice, of the new society, and the defeat of capitalism."

FRANCISCO: "Its elimination."

FELIPE: "I see that when Christ spoke of the Last Judgment he didn't speak of religion, prayers, ritual: he spoke only of social needs."

ALEJANDRO: "Let's make no mistake about that: there are religious people who think they are good people because they give aid, alms, old shoes. That's not what Christ demands in this Gospel; it's a total change in the social system."

WILLIAM: "Christ speaks of visiting the sick; that's the only thing you could do at that time. Now he would have talked of clinics, free medical service, hygienic conditions, preventive medicine."

OLIVIA: "And being in prison? He just says 'I was in prison.' To be in prison is very wretched; being tortured in jail, the way they torture those Christs now, is much worse."

Someone from the opposite shore: "But somebody said that prayers are bad."

I: "What Felipe said was that in this Last Judgment no attention is paid to whether they prayed."

FELIPE: "They don't even pay attention to whether they had faith."

I: "More than that: those who are saved appear here as though they had no faith in Christ."

Then those who turned out to be righteous will say: "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?" And the king will answer them: "I tell you truly that everything you did for one of these my brothers, however humble they may be, you did it for me."

The man from the opposite shore: "So religion is good for nothing?"

ELVIS: "If religion helps me to help my neighbor, then it's useful. If it makes me ignore my neighbor's needs, it's of no use."

OLIVIA: "When you go and see to it that a sick person doesn't die, that's prayer."

ALEJANDRO: "Going back to that final part: the identification is very clear. 'What you did with these…these are me.' We're always believing that Jesus Christ is a distant person, different from the people. And it seems to me very important, as it's been important to me for a long time: that even if a person is a snob, that person is God, no matter who. God identifies himself with human beings; God makes no distinction. And that's what makes revolutionary love spring up."

NATALIA: "God identifies with the needy. With the poor. With the humble."

ALEJANDRO: "With everybody that's screwed."

I: "With everybody that's screwed, as Alejandro says. I was saying before that that Son of Man would be a collective Christ, a society; and now I'm surer of it because of what Alejandro has said: Christ is the society of the poor, the proletariat, as we say today. And this people is the one that's going to judge."

ALEJANDRO: "That's right; he's going to judge those who were good to him and those who were evil."

OLIVIA: "So we're not going to have Christ coming from heaven to sit on a throne surrounded by his angels. It's the people that are going to do justice. The people are going to say: we were undernourished, barefoot, sick, landless, in the Model Prison."

FELIPE: "The people's angels, I think, are all the ones that have helped liberation."

I: "In the Bible, angels are God's messengers, or God's employees, and it seems to me that Felipe has given a good biblical interpretation. When Christ says he will come surrounded by angels he is presenting himself as God, for in the Bible only God is surrounded by angels; but he is also

presenting himself as the people, for when he speaks in the first person (‘I was hungry…I was in prison’) it is the people that's speaking. So he's trying to tell us that the people is God. And so when I told them in the Military Court that God was going to judge everyone, I could have said that the people was going to judge everyone.”

ALEJANDRO: “The tortured ones, the starving, the ones from the wretched districts like Acahualinca, they're the ones who can best understand injustices. The ones who are suffering them, who are God. That's very simple, isn't it?”

JULIO: “That means that here it's up to the exploited ones to put themselves in God's place, who they really are, and say to the rich: I was thirsty and you did not give me water. And so the exploited ones will have to say those words.”

ALEJANDRO: “And who else is going to say them?”

GIGI: “But now it's the people in the new society who are going to be the judge. When the people have power.”

I: “When the Revolution spreads to the whole planet. ‘People of all nations’ means all of humanity. Right now we can't, right now we're being judged by them. There is that Military Court. And with that Court they're putting a lot of people in jail: to be able to go on keeping the people hungry, without clothes, without medicine, without houses.”

WILLIAM: “In Christianity there's been a lot of preaching that Jesus ‘is hidden’ in the poor, and this has helped to maintain the difference between Jesus and the poor.”

I: “And it's curious: those who were good to Jesus, he says they didn't do it for religious motives, and they didn't do it for him; they did it just to help their neighbor. It seems to me that this applies to all revolutions: none of them has been religious or Christian (at times they've been anti-religious and anti-Christian instead) and the revolutionaries didn't know they were doing it for God. I think that here Jesus is keeping the revolutionaries in mind. And foreseeing that all revolutions would be atheistic.”

ALEJANDRO: “That's uncomfortable.”

I: “Why?”

ALEJANDRO: “As we'd said before the people as a whole is Jesus. And now it's turning out that what they did for the people they did for Jesus. So in the long run is there a distinction between the people and Jesus?”

I: “He doesn't make the distinction; it's the others that make it. From the first he says, ‘they fed *me*…they gave *me* clothing’; he's saying that he is the poor. But he's surrounded by angels, and he's also God. This reminds me of a parable that Mao tells, the one of the ‘Old Madman who Moved a Mountain.’ It's an old Chinese parable, of an old man that insisted stubbornly on moving a mountain, and he succeeded: because God rewarded his effort and moved it for him. And Mao says: ‘The same thing will happen with us if we persist obstinately, but in reality, for us, God is the masses.’ This seems to be pure atheism. But I think that Christ is doing something similar, when he tells us about the Last Judgment and puts the people in God's place; for in the whole biblical tradition God was going to make the Last Judgment.”

GIGI: “And the oppressors didn't know either that it was Christ they were oppressing. They thought Christ was one thing and the people was another.”

MANUEL: “That's what people have always thought.”

GIGI: “Some didn't believe in him and yet they were good to him in their neighbors. Others believed in him and they weren't good to him in their neighbors.”

WILLIAM: “And it seems to me he's showing that the damned were people who fulfilled their religious duties. But they were making a distinction between Christ and the neighbors.”

GIGI (smiling): “This is a kind of atheistic parable.”

> *Then the king will say to those on his left: “Get away from me, you damned ones; go to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you did not feed me.”*

LAUREANO: “They're probably cursing those bastards that are dead there: ‘Son of a bitch!’ But they're not going to be resurrected.”

I: “And isn't there going to be any punishment for those who lived only among riches and pleasures, just having a good life, without any punishment here?”

ALEJANDRO: “The fact is that the life of the rich isn't at all a pleasant life; the life of the rich, shit! It's miserable. The worst part is that with their money they're making poor people miserable too.”

WILLIAM: “There are rich people's lives that are delightful. I don't envy them, but I recognize it; why kid ourselves, why say they live bad if they

live well?”

ALEJANDRO: “All those rich families in the movies. What goes on between father and daughter, son and mother; they have horrible lives. Yes, those have been damned all their lives.”

I: “But here we're talking about an eternal punishment.”

LAUREANO: “It means that they're going to be suffering.”

MANUEL: “Their punishment, a punishment forever, is having been what they were.”

OSCAR: “The eternal fire, it seems to me, is the torture of selfishness.”

I: “If saved humanity will be eternally united, those who separate from it will be eternally separated. The first ones Jesus calls ‘the blessed of my Father.’ The second ones he just calls ‘cursed.’ He doesn't call them ‘the cursed of my Father’; it's because God doesn't curse anyone. They have cursed themselves.”

OSCAR: “Those of us who believe ourselves to be religious can be under a curse. Maybe somebody came to me hungry and I didn't help that person at that moment; and maybe I say, I'm religious. For me religion is worthless! What's worthwhile is loving. And it's not just because I'm religious that I'm going to be saved.”

I: “And those who are saved, Christ is telling them they'll receive the kingdom that God prepared for them. On the other hand those who are damned, he doesn't tell them they'll go to the eternal fire that God prepared for them but that God prepared for the devil and his angels. And it's also interesting that Christ says the kingdom was prepared from ‘the beginning of the world.’ The fact is that evolution has had an aim from the beginning: the establishment of that kingdom of love, on this planet and on all the millions of inhabited planets that there must be in the universe.”

GIGI: “I believe we'll survive as a collective consciousness of humanity, if we've been good. If not, we can't be part of that consciousness.”

“And do you think there's a heaven?”

GIGI: “Heaven is this earth.”

I: “And it can also be the heaven above, that we all see: the starry sky. This can even be explained with Marxist philosophy, called dialectical materialism, which says that matter is eternal. It has existed and it will exist forever; not the slightest particle can ever be destroyed. And I say: if material is eternal, there is also an eternal life, and an eternal consciousness. And when we die, we can go to form part of that universal consciousness,

depending on the degree of evolution that we have reached; or else we can remain eternally separated. And it seems to me that we can understand the resurrection of our bodies this way: that since we're part of the consciousness of the universe, our bodies will be the whole universe."

GIGI: "And it's very clear what Jesus says here: that it's those who love ('I was hungry and you fed me') who are going to have eternal life. Those who have loved him, which is the people. Or have loved the people, which is him. (It's all the same.)"

WILLIAM: "Those who establish justice on earth. That's why he finished by saying that 'The just will go to eternal life.'"

I: "Those who are saved he twice calls 'the just.' In the Bible the 'unjust' are those who rob orphans and widows, those who are responsible for there being poor, who get rich at the expense of others, take away lands, commit fraud, are bloody and cruel, in short, they are the oppressors. The 'just' are the opposite of all that. 'Just' is equal to revolutionaries. And 'Judgment' in the Bible, as Jose Porfirio Miranda explains very well, means liberation or the establishment of revolutionary justice. The Book of 'Judges' deals with liberating chieftains of Israel, none of whom performed a judicial function in the modern sense. In the Bible it says that God 'judges the orphans and the indigent,' and that means that he saves them, not that he takes them to a Military Court. And Yahweh the 'Judge' in the Bible is not a neutral judge who's going to judge rich and poor equally; he's the avenger of the poor. All the liberating actions of God in the history of Israel were called 'God's justices.' But the people were again oppressed, and they were hoping for a final, definitive liberation, a judgment after which there would be no need for any other judgment, a Last Judgment. And that's the one that Jesus has described for us."

89.

The Rich Young Man

(Luke 18:18–30)

One of the leaders asked him: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

I: "One of the leaders means one of the ruling class. When he describes this scene, Matthew just says he was a young man. So he was a young man from the upper classes; a rich young man."

Jesus said to him: "Why do you call me good? There is only one who is good, and that one is God."

MANUEL: "It seems he's forgetting that he is God and he doesn't want to be called good. Because he says only God is good. So it's in company with the Father and the Holy Spirit that he's good, that is, in unity. It seems that a single person isn't good; a person is good only in unity."

OLIVIA: "But I think too that he tells him this because the young man appeared before him as good. He was a somebody, that rich young man, and he came to present himself as a good young man. He came with brow raised high, the shameless one, to say that he obeyed the commandments; and Jesus doesn't want to be called Good Master because he sees that he's saying it because he's calling himself good. To the young man, he and the Master are equally important persons, and they are both good."

ALEJANDRO, Olivia's son: "But what Manuel says opened a whole new field to me. He revealed something I'd never seen: that Jesus is good only in his union with God; nobody can be good alone (unless they go off into the

mountain, to be in a cave). We are good only in society. We are good united in society, and that means united to God, love. And a single person not helped by the others isn't good; that seems to me very profound."

I: It seems to me also that for that upper-class young man there were good teachers in Israel, and Jesus is telling him that no teacher is good for anything. The only teachings he should follow were those of God, love."

> *"You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery; do not kill; do not steal; do not tell lies about anyone; respect your father and your mother.' " The man said: "All this I have obeyed since I was a child."*

I: "It's curious: Jesus tells him that he has to obey the commandments; and when he names the commandments, he names only those about love your neighbor. He doesn't mention the commandment about love of God."

FELIPE: "It would seem that to Jesus those are the only commandments. And the young man thought he was obeying them, and he wasn't, because he was lacking the most important thing: sharing."

JULIO: "He thought he wasn't stealing and wasn't killing and wasn't lying, and he was a rich man!"

Young ADAN: "Of course, he was exploiting and stealing and he didn't realize it."

> *When Jesus heard this he said to him: "One thing is lacking: sell everything you have and give it to the poor and then you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me." But when the man heard this, he became very sad, because he was very rich*.

MANUEL: "I think probably that rich man wasn't stealing. If he had been, Jesus Christ would have reproached him for it, because he was no fool. He would have said to him: You did too steal. But let's suppose the man was honest; he's telling him that he must get rid of selfishness, that he had respected all the commandments but he still had all that wealth and even though he'd got it honestly, he must give it up."

ALEJANDRO: "There's no wealth honestly acquired."

MANUEL: "But just suppose the man has acquired his wealth honestly."

ALEJANDRO: "No, it's only by stealing that you acquire wealth. They always steal."

MANUEL: “Or inherited.”

ALEJANDRO: “Then they've inherited from somebody who stole.”

OLIVIA: “God gave the earth to everybody equally; if anybody has anything that others don't have, they must have stolen it some way.”

FELIPE: “Yes, I think that from the moment he tells him to go sell his wealth and divide it up, it's because he didn't come by it honestly. Of course he won't say: you've stolen this, go divide it up. It's a way of saying to him: don't go around stealing.”

I: “According to the law he hadn't stolen. But Christ is a subversive and he converts wealth into a crime. This rich man, who surely had inherited the wealth because he was young, wanted also, as he says, ‘to inherit eternal life.’ But Christ tells him that the two wealths are opposed to each other.”

OSCAR: “The boy had told him that he obeyed everything, but when Jesus told him to give everything back, he didn't like that, so he still couldn't enjoy the kingdom of God because he wouldn't give up what he had.”

ELVIS: “It means that if a poor young man has obeyed all the commandments, he's okay, right?”

OSCAR: “It seems that it's easier for the poor man. As long as he does all that, well, he can win the kingdom of heaven. Because what can he give if he's got nothing? So I think Jesus is taking these shots at the rich. Because he could carry out all the commandments but it won't do him a bit of good because he won't let go of what he's got.”

ELVIS: “But also if a poor young man doesn't practice love he's just like the rich man.”

OSCAR: “But I say it's still easier for him.”

JULIO: “I see one thing: he doesn't say to give alms or to share a lot; he says give it all.”

FATHER JOSE ANTONIO, a Peruvian priest who is visiting us: “Just before I came here, a workman said to me, in a bus, while we were crossing through the ruins of Managua: ‘Here there was great injustice and it's a good thing all this has been destroyed. I think everything God does is very good, lovely, and that the evil in the world is done by people.’ And on coming here I have seen the splendid work of God, these islands, and also a beautiful work of people, the unity of this community. I believe the rich young man was seeking this, that he didn't find it, love, in riches. Love is the only thing that gives us happiness. Jesus had told him he must put aside

all that was preventing him from loving. He had wanted to enter the kingdom, but he still wanted to be rich, and that's why he was sad.”

I: “He was a good young man. The Gospel According to Saint Mark says that Jesus stood looking at him fondly when he said that he had obeyed all the commandments since childhood. But he had that drawback, that he was very rich. Jesus offered him happiness, but he preferred riches, and he was left saddened.”

> *When he saw him sad, Jesus said: “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”*

PANCHO: “The young man was presuming that he had obeyed everything. Jesus let him talk, but afterwards he put him to the test and he didn't measure up. When Jesus told him to share, he didn't like it. Then Jesus said how hard it is for a rich man to enter.”

OSCAR: “He was good, but he didn't feel satisfied in spite of being good. And that's why he had to ask Christ what was lacking for him to feel satisfied. And he never expected it was going to be his wealth. He thought he was going to ask him to do something else. But when he heard the answer he became sad, because he wasn't expecting that.”

FELIPE: “But I also do believe what Pancho says, that that guy wanted to show he was a very religious man, a good Christian. But when Christ told him that, he got sad because he saw he really wasn't obeying everything, that he couldn't be a Christian.”

“I want you to tell me: a rich man can't get into the kingdom of heaven?”

OSCAR: “It seems to me he can't.”

ADAN: “He cannot.”

LAUREANO: “And that bastard wasn't obeying the commandments. Because a son of a bitch that has plenty of money and doesn't give it to the needy isn't obeying the commandments.”

GLORIA: “We saw in the parable of the rich man and the beggar that the rich man was condemned just because he was rich: because in the parable it didn't say he was exactly an evil rich man.”

LAUREANO: “All by itself the word ‘rich’ means a rich bastard.”

OSCAR: “And this young man, what he really loved was his money. What Laureano says is true, it's obvious; he wasn't obeying anything!”

I: “The very fact that this young man was rich while others were poor meant that Israel was breaking the law of God, because God in the desert had given to the people the precept that among them there should be no poor people and therefore that there shouldn't be rich people.”

MYRIAM: “And nowadays, there's a lot like that, who think they're obeying the commandments.”

OSCAR: “A lot? The world is full of them!”

ADAN: “It seems to me that what Jesus said about the rich screwed them; he left them absolutely finished: outside the kingdom. He sent them to the kingdom of death, you might say.”

FELIPE: “The rich, upper-class people, it'll be hard for them to be with the revolution. That's the way I see all that about the camel and the needle's eye. The bourgeoisie can't enter the kingdom of God.”

MYRIAM: “How hard it is for a rich man who doesn't want to help others with his money to have love!”

Those who heard him said: “Then who can be saved?” Jesus said to them: “What men cannot do God can do.”

LAUREANO: “I think that he was trying to tell them that one person can't make another person change, but God can make that person change.”

FELIPE: “It seems to me that he's also showing them that there are two kinds of actions: God's action and human action. People with their own human ideologies can't do this, share what they have. But with God's ideology they can indeed do it.”

OLIVIA: “Even the rich can be saved, if they share, but not if they don't. And it's God who through a miracle can make the rich share and also be saved.”

LAUREANO: “I think God's been sleeping a lot, because God ought to have made them share.”

I: “Through the history of Christianity there have been rich who have abandoned everything to follow Christ; many great saints were former rich people. Saint Anthony the Abbot was a young Egyptian millionaire who had inherited enormous estates, and at the age of twenty he went into a church at the moment when the priest was reading this Gospel phrase that we've just seen: ‘Sell all you have and give it to the poor.’ And he did that at once. But it's true that such cases are exceptional, and as Laureano says,

it would seem as though God has been asleep. But Christ himself has said the rich can be saved only through a miracle. That's why we have to create a system in which the wealth is shared, so that in all of society we can fulfill what Jesus asks here of the rich young man. Or rather, so that there won't be any more rich young men and so that everyone can enter the kingdom of heaven."

ALEJANDRO: "No more rich young men, and also no more wretched young men."

I: "There won't be any poor people to distribute the wealth to, because with it all distributed there won't be rich and poor. That's the kingdom of God. And for a rich man, being rich, to enter that kingdom is like for a camel to enter the needle's eye, because in that kingdom there can't be injustice or inequality."

> *Peter said to him: "Lord, we have abandoned what we had, to follow you." He answered: "I tell you truly that anyone who leaves home or parents or brothers or wife or children for the kingdom of God will receive much more in this world and in the future world: eternal life."*

ALEJANDRO: "We see that the poor also have things that they can abandon: home, parents, brothers, wife, children, those are riches that the poor can give up."

FATHER JOSE ANTONIO: "But that giving up means to receive more of that very wealth, from now on, in adoration to life in the future kingdom, which is a life that does not die."

JULIO: "He tells us to put selfishness aside. Because there are also poor people who don't want to give up anything; and there are people who say that communism or the change 'is going to take what I have away from me.' How can they take away from me if I barely have an acre to live on! That must be for people who have five hundred or a thousand acres, people who own half of Nicaragua, and they're the ones who'll have to give it to the poor."

OLIVIA: "Yes, we poor can also be selfish and just hang on to the four hens we have."

LAUREANO: "The little hawkers who have their little stalls, the ones that sell in the street, they have a horror of change because somebody's going to take away from them what they sell in the street. It's pure ignorance. They

don't know that afterwards they won't need to go around selling like idiots crying their wares in the street.”

ADAN: “Maybe nobody's shown them the Gospel.”

90.

The Curing of a Blind Man

(Luke 18:35–43)

We were in Papaturro, a village near the Costa Rican border, reached by a river on the banks of which there are always monkeys and lots of water birds. The little church is in a cocoa grove, and as it was very hot inside we had our commentary outside under the cocoa trees.

We read that the blind man was begging at the roadside. He asked what the racket was, and they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. He shouted:

"Jesus, Son of David, have pity on me!"

I: "At the time of Christ, they had begun to give the Messiah the title of Son of David. Some writings of the period have been preserved, the Psalms of Solomon, which announced that the Son of David would free Israel from all the enemies that oppressed it, would drive all sinners out of the country, would also destroy all immoral nations, would establish justice throughout the world, and would rule over a great people."

OLIVIA: "I bet that blind man already heard the news that Jesus was around there, and he was probably anxiously waiting for him, and when he heard all that hubbub, all those people walking along there, he thought maybe that's it. And when they told him it was Jesus, he shouted because he wanted to see and because of his faith in Jesus as a liberator."

"That 'have pity on me,' only a person can say it who feels very humiliated, very poor. He was begging beside the road. There are rich people that are blind but this was a blind beggar."

“When he calls him Son of David he's calling him leader of the people. He's being subversive.”

“Sure, like suppose we get to a city, San Carlos, for example, and we shout, ‘Hurray for President So-and-So,’ who's not the president, right?”

“To have him called Son of David wouldn't be very pleasing to some people.”

“And here it says they shut him up.”

Those who were at the front of the group scolded him to make him stop, but he cried even louder: “Son of David, have pity on me!”

“Like somebody that'd be shouting ‘Hurray for Che Guevara!’”

“He really wasn't afraid of death.”

I: “They've told him that the one who was passing by is Jesus of Nazareth. Nazareth was an insignificant town. It seems they called him ‘Nazarene’ as a kind of nickname.”

“Like saying Solentiname.”

I: “They've told him that Jesus the Nazarene is passing by, but he doesn't call him that; he shouts ‘Son of David.’”

“Maybe the ones that shut him up were friends of Jesus, his followers, who were kind of hiding him. That's why they said: ‘Shut up, don't shout, don't say the leader is here, the messiah.’”

I: “It had been prophesied that the messiah was going to come to give sight to the blind, to make the deaf hear, to cure the sick, to free the captives, and this blind man, by begging Jesus to give him sight, is also proclaiming him messiah.”

Then Jesus stopped and had the blind man brought to him. When he was close, Jesus asked him: “What do you want me to do for you?”

LAUREANO: “That sure was a dumb question.”

OLIVIA: “It was to test his faith and confidence. He already knew that's what he was going to ask of him, that he had so much faith he was going to ask him for sight.”

“But do you think Jesus knew that?”

ELVIS: “If he'd known it he wouldn't have asked.”

I: “The man hadn't said what he wanted. He only asked him to have pity on him.”

LAUREANO: “Yes, but if a blind man is there begging and he says ‘Have pity on me,’ it's either so they'll give him money or sight.”

I: “Well, it could be that he was begging for alms.”

LAUREANO: “Oh, no, because they announced that the Son of David was going to give sight to the blind and health to the lame and all that.”

I: “Well, then, we see that he knew about Jesus. Because he could have been just asking for alms. ‘A little help for me.’”

LAUREANO: “No, he was asking for eyes, not for anything else.”

The blind man answered: “Lord, I want to see again.” Jesus said to him: “See! You are cured because you believed.”

“Along there where Jesus was going maybe there were other blind people, or other beggars, blind or not, and Jesus didn't do a thing for them. They weren't asking him for anything, they didn't believe in him.”

“And that's what happens to all us poor. We're always in trouble and we don't all have faith that he's the liberator of the poor.”

“The people is a blind man begging for alms at the edge of a road.”

“And when he asks for freedom they tell him to shut up because they can really screw him.”

At that moment the blind man could see and he followed Jesus praising God. And all the people that saw this, they also praised God.

“This shows the faith he had, because he followed him praising God.”

I: “And why God? The one that cured him was Jesus.”

LAUREANO: “He knew it was all the same.”

“It seems to me that following Jesus like it says here is like following the revolution. At that time Jesus was the man of the revolution; he was the head of it.”

I: “It says he went praising God. That meant he was proclaiming that God had sent the messiah.”

ALEJANDRO: “Ah, you're right! I hadn't thought of that.”

I: “He was praising God for having sent the messiah. ‘Praising God’ and ‘blessing God’ and ‘giving thanks to God,’ which are all the same, in the Bible mean proclaiming freedom from oppression. This is not praising God as the charismatics do.”

“And all the others opened their eyes too, and they saw what they hadn't seen before, that Jesus was the messiah, the Son of David, because that man revealed it to them. Because it says the rest of them also praised God with him.”

“So it seems that all those people turned subversives.”

“That blind man changed into a leader, and he made us see that any one of us can be a leader, because he was the one that made the other people praise God.”

I: “That blind man at the side of the road probably had heard about Jesus. He'd been told deeds or parables of Jesus, and he already believed in him; he believed he was the messiah, the national liberator. And according to the Gospel, that's having faith: believing that Jesus is the messiah. That man was proclaiming him king. It's curious that at other times Jesus doesn't allow people to call him messiah, but here he does allow it. At other times, after a cure, he tells them not to speak of it, but not here. It's because he's about to have his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. This cure happened in Jericho, near Jerusalem. It was going to be his triumphal entry, and his death.”

ALEJANDRO: “And coming back to what was said before, about praising God: it's like praising God through the revolution.”

FELIPE: “But if we don't believe in that, if we believe there'll always be selfishness, then we can't change things.”

91.

Zacchaeus

(Luke 19:1–10)

We read the story of the rich publican who wanted to see Jesus when he entered Jericho.

> *But he couldn't see him because there were many people and Zacchaeus was a short man. Then he went ahead of them and climbed a sycamore near where Jesus had to pass*.

TOMAS PEÑA: “It seems to me that rich guy didn't have any false pride. When he saw Jesus was going to pass by there, he climbed right up to look at him. Even though he was an important guy, he shinnied up a trunk like a kid; he didn't mind looking silly. He didn't look like a rich man up there, just like a youngster that's going to see something that interests him.”

“Maybe because he was short he was humble.”

“He could have told the people ‘Stand back’ with that pride rich people usually have and he could have gone to where Jesus was. But he was satisfied just to look at him.”

OSCAR: “I think that because he was rich everybody respected him, right? But when Jesus showed up there, the rich man felt tiny, he felt…like he was repenting, I don't know. He didn't feel proud or conceited; he realized that what he was doing to other people he shouldn't be doing. That's why he felt so tiny facing Jesus.”

BOSCO: “Maybe he was afraid too that Jesus would be mad at him because he was rich, and Jesus was against the rich and he knew it.”

When Jesus passed by there, he looked up and said: "Zacchaeus, you come right down because today I've got to stay at your house."

FELIPE: "But even though he was rich he liked Jesus and he was very glad to take him home, even knowing that Jesus was talking against the rich."

ALEJANDRO: "Other times we've seen Jesus against the rich, but here we see he wasn't a prejudiced man or a fanatic. He chooses to stay in a rich man's house without getting an invitation. He invites himself. Even when there were plenty of other places where he could stay, because there were swarms of people welcoming him."

OLIVIA: "At least Jesus saw he was a rich man who could be humble, and so he was a rich man that could be saved. If Jesus hadn't gone to where he was, that man would have gone on being rich. He would just have looked at him, been content to see Jesus passing by from up in a tree. But Jesus wants to save him."

When they saw this, everyone began to criticize, saying Jesus had gone to stay with a sinner.

TOMAS: "People didn't understand or even know what Jesus was looking for. They didn't know his mystery. He was coming to save sinners, not to destroy them. That guy that was on the edge of the pit, he came to pull him back and set him on the good road."

FELIPE: "They thought he'd gone to stay there so he could have a good time. They probably said: Why didn't he stay with a poor family, with Christians?"

I: "They don't criticize that he's gone to stay with a rich man but that he's gone to stay with a sinner. This rich man belonged to the class that were then called 'publicans,' people who weren't religious and who were despised by the Pharisees even though they were rich. You have to keep in mind that in that society, which wasn't capitalistic, the ruling class wasn't people that just had money, like Zacchaeus, but people that belonged to a religious caste (which had money as well). The scandal is that Jesus has gone to stay with someone who isn't religious, and it seems that's why Jesus went to his house."

Then Zacchaeus stood up and told the Lord: "Look, Lord, I'm going to give away half of all I have and if I've robbed and deceived anybody, I'll give it back fourfold."

"It sounds like he'd done some stealing."

"Of course he had; if he hadn't he wouldn't have been rich."

OLIVIA: "This would be the end of his capital, because everything he had must have been stolen."

I: "He must have been left with nothing, as Olivia says. At first he only intended to give half of what he had, which according to him was honestly earned, and give back four times what he'd stolen. But afterwards he'd gradually realized that everything he had was stolen."

Jesus said to him: "Today salvation has come to this house, since this man is also a descendant of Abraham."

TOMAS: "He'd brought him back into the family, right? He'd been off to one side, but Jesus brought him back into the family."

I: "This fellow, though he was a Jew, the others didn't think he belonged to the chosen people because he wasn't religious."

OSCAR: "And those people that believed themselves religious and went around criticizing, don't you think they were bigger thieves than that little shrimp?"

I: "Absolutely, because Jesus says of the others that they'd be robbing widows and orphans while they prayed on and on. And he tells them that publicans and whores will get into the kingdom of heaven ahead of them. (He doesn't say 'prostitutes' but 'whores.' The Greek word *'porne'* that he uses is equivalent to our word 'whores.')"

ALEJANDRO: "Now we see it: pious people aren't revolutionary."

OLIVIA: "It seems like private property is what's holding back the kingdom of heaven. That private property, individual property, is what's stopping the kingdom of heaven from reaching people. And taking a good look at it, it seems to me that, if there's any way to do it, they ought to close down the churches. Because look, with this false gospel that they're preaching, people think the sacraments are the whole thing. So a rich guy takes communion and goes out and he's done his duty. And the more churches there are open and the more preaching, or more lying, it seems to

me, in the churches, the more delays there'll be in the coming of the kingdom of love.”

I: “What you say is quite right. Churches ought to be closed down unless they preach freedom in them. In China, for example, they've had to close the churches because they were getting in the way of liberation. They weren't preaching the true Gospel in them, this salvation that Christ talks about here in Zacchaeus’ house, the salvation of the rich that consists of dividing up their capital.”

WILLIAM: “And when Jesus says: ‘Today salvation has come to this house,’ it's as if he'd said: ‘Today the revolution has come to this house.’”

DONALD: “Now he's got to do just the opposite of what he was doing before. Before he was finding ways to increase his money. Now he's doing the opposite.”

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.

WILLIAM: “It's interesting that he says ‘what’ and it's because he's referring not only to people but also to things, to wealth. What's in the hands of a few and lost to the majority. Christ has come to liberate the wealth, making it be shared, and naturally people too will be liberated.”

DONALD: “And with a liberating Gospel it's interesting that more churches will be opened.”

MANUEL: “But there's so many rich, filthy rich, that are very religious, and they think they've welcomed Jesus into their homes, and they don't do anything like what this Zacchaeus is doing, they don't divide up anything.”

TOMAS: “Jesus hasn't been in their houses. There's nothing for him to do there. They're off to the side.”

I: “Here we have an example of what the Gospel calls a conversion, which means a change (this translation of ours aptly calls it ‘change of attitude’). Change of attitude or conversion is the same as revolution. It can't be only the individual, it has to be society too, and it can't be only society without being a change in individuals too. Anything else? If you agree, we'll stop here.”

92.

The Resurrection of Lazarus

(John 11:17–44)

Jesus said to her: "Your brother will live again." And Martha said: "I know that he will rise up in the resurrection of the dead on the last day." Then Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, even though he is dead, will live; and he who is alive, and believes in me, will never die. Do you believe this?"

BOSCO: "Maybe she wasn't happy about the last day, because the last day was a long way off."

FELIPE: "It seems to me that Martha was thinking the way the old people have thought, our ancestors; at least that's what they used to tell me. They believed a lot in a last judgment in which everybody was going to be resuscitated, the caskets would be opened, I don't know how. It seems as though this Martha was thinking of that. But I think he's telling her it's not like that at all. He appears, I'd say, more modern. He's telling her something very revolutionary there. He's telling her that with him the resurrection has arrived, and there's no point in waiting for that last judgment. He tells her that if he was a good man, even though he died, he hasn't died. And so anyone else who died, if they were good, then they haven't died. He tells her, then, to forget about the last day; what's important is doing good."

I: "He says that all who believe in him even though they die will live. He is incarnate love upon the earth, and one who believes in him is one who believes in his message of love; and this is not a resurrection on a last day, but it's beginning right now, as Felipe says."

FRANCISCO: “To believe his teaching is to practice it, because anybody who doesn't practice it doesn't believe it.”

WILLIAM: “He says those who have died will live and those who are alive will never die. I believe the two things are the same: for you to die and to go on living. But the first, about the dead, is for us to be consoled about the deaths of those we love, and the second, about the living, is for us not to be afflicted about our own death.”

ALEJANDRO: “I see that he says he's the resurrection and the life, as if they're two different things. And they really are two different things. Resurrection is a momentary event, and life is eternal, life is evolution: it's a process that doesn't end.”

BOSCO: “But Lazarus must have died after he was resuscitated.”

WILLIAM: “Of course he did.”

I: “He means that he's talking of another resurrection when he tells Martha that he is the resurrection and the life. We see that she wasn't happy with the idea that her brother would rise up on the last day; she wouldn't be very happy with the idea that her brother would rise up to die again in a few years, and that he'd have to be resurrected after all on the last day. Jesus is telling her something very daring, something that would scandalize any religious person: the last judgment is the doctrine that I bring for society; I am the last day.”

FELIPE: “It's as if he said to her: Child, stop believing in fairy tales.”

PANCHO: “Who knows? Maybe she didn't believe much in the last day either.”

OLIVIA: “He's talking about an eternal life, for physically we all have to die. But to live eternally you have to die the momentary sleep of death. But though you have to die you don't have to be enslaved by death, you can live eternally. The way your life is is the way your death will be. Jesus, then, is talking of eternal life, that the sleep of death is to live forever; that we're like a plant: that the seeds first have to be sown to bear fruit. Then Jesus is talking to her of a life that maybe she can't even imagine, that she's going to live forever. At that moment she only has the grief of not seeing her brother; that's why she's sad.”

BOSCO: “That's what happened with Sandino and Che, who believed in the same communism as Jesus believed in, and though they died they're not dead.”

WILLIAM: “And when he says that all those who believe in him, even though they die, will live, I think instead that it's because they die that they will live. Just like the grain of wheat. And to die is to die from a bullet, and it's also to give up your life for other people and to live for other people. And then, the ones who believe in him, because they die, they will live.”

I: “It seems to me that that physical death that Olivia talks about we might call individual death. The individual dies but we go on living joined to humanity, which is joined to Christ. Each person dies but humanity is destined to live forever, as the body cells die each moment but the body goes on living. And so we die as cells, but we can go on living with a superindividual life which is the life of the organism, if there is love in us: because love is what keeps that organism alive. And that organism is the body of Christ, which has eternal life.”

WILLIAM: “I remember a sentence of Fidel, in one of the last speeches of his that I heard. He says that imperialisms will pass away but the revolution is eternal.”

I: “The revolution, which is the unity of humanity, remains; and that is the life that Christ talks about. And in another speech Fidel has said that individuals can disappear but the people endure, the people have eternal life. And he adds that the motto ‘Homeland or Death!’ means that it doesn't matter if you die as long as your people live.”

When Jesus saw the weeping of Mary and of the Jews that were with her he was very sad and his heart was troubled, and he asked them: “Where did you bury him?” And they said to him: “Lord, come and see.” And Jesus wept.

OSCAR: “I think he wept there not for the death of Lazarus but because they didn't have faith in him, in the resurrection.”

DONALD: “He was sad because he had feelings and, like any one of us, when he sees somebody crying, he cries. When he saw the grief of the family, he was moved to the point of crying.”

Somebody asked Oscar: “And you don't cry when you see a friend crying because his brother died?”

He answered: “I cry because I don't have the power that he had, to say to him: Get up out of there, come out of that tomb.”

I: “Well, here it says that when he saw the weeping he was saddened. It may be that it's as Donald says, that he wept for the death of a friend, but at the same time it may be a little like Oscar says, because he saw that we're always going to weep even though he brings resurrection; that even though the dead will live, for us there always exists the reality of death. There are some ancient Gospel manuscripts that don't say that Jesus was saddened but that he was angered, and there are biblical scholars who maintain that that was probably the original version, because it is stronger, and it's more likely that a copyist ‘corrected’ angered to saddened, which seems more logical than the reverse.”

OSCAR: “That's what I say: that he got angry because they didn't believe in the resurrection.”

DONALD: “Or he got angry with death.”

I: “Or maybe both. But whether it was sadness or anger that he felt, the fact is that afterwards, at the tomb, he wept. In spite of his being the resurrection and the life.”

FELIPE: “And we, when we see a companion die, even though we know he'll live forever, we have to weep for him.”

ALEJANDRO: “An example occurs to me: you take a *madroño* trunk and use it as a beam in a house. It doesn't blossom, but it's useful for something else. It can't bear the white flowers that it used to bear in the woods because it died from that world, but it's going to be of use in another world. And for the tree that change is painful; transformation is always painful.”

WILLIAM: “Like when Che died, people wept for him, but his death was going to serve its purpose.”

ALEJANDRO: “Here we have many church beams that are from *madroño* trees that used to bear flowers in December, and now they don't, but now they're all painted and they'll last for many years. Human beings are different, they produce more, but they're the same in that the transformation is always painful.”

WILLIAM: “That can be a poem.”

I: “It's very poetic because it's very true.”

WILLIAM: “When Che died Fidel wept; but in that speech where he wept, he was saying that Che hadn't died.”

“He was a seed fallen to the ground. Che dead is more dangerous than Che alive.”

FELIPE: “Because now he's not just Che.”

WILLIAM: “And his death, by God, cast his shadow over the whole world!”

FELIPE: “Now Che dead isn't just Che; his spirit exists in many Ches.”

BOSCO: “There's a bunch of Ches, thousands of Ches.”

Jesus said to her: “Didn't I tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?”

I: “In the Bible the glory of God is the triumph of God over the oppressors. It's like saying the liberation. When they crossed the Red Sea, freeing themselves from Egypt, the Bible says they saw the glory of God. The glory of God is any victory of justice over injustice. And in the Bible that glory of God is God himself, it's his appearance in history, because the God of the Bible is essentially liberation.”

ESPERANZA: “Ernesto, it seems to me it's like if now someone is talking to someone else about the change, for example, and the other one says: ‘Oh, but when will it ever come?’ We have to have faith, then, that Christ told the woman: ‘Didn't I tell you that if you believe you'll see the glory of God?’ Many people say: When'll that be? But there are others who manage to have faith and to believe, and so then they work for that. You have to have faith even if you can't see clearly.”

I: “And we can say that the glory of God is change, is revolution. And Jesus is telling Martha that, if she believes, she's going to see that glory in the resurrection of her brother, a symbol of the resurrection of humanity.”

ADAN: “We have been dead. The people have been dead. And now we're beginning to live.”

FELIPE: “The way I was seeing it is that Lazarus comes to life. This is an example to let people see. It seems to me that now we can see we're exploited, pushed aside by an unjust society. But we can also see that this is going to change right away, like Lazarus who rose up, and there he was stinking in that cave and then they took him out and he came out resuscitated. I think this is something symbolic, but it's going to be a reality in society through the faith of all of us who believe in new ideas. This faith will make it happen.”

Then they took away the stone. And Jesus looked toward heaven and said: “Father, I thank you because you have listened to me. I know

that you always listen to me, but I say it for the good of these people here, so that they will believe that you have sent me."

FELIPE: "That means that if Jesus had been with people who had understood him clearly he wouldn't have had to be praying or any of that stuff."

BOSCO: "And he wouldn't have had to resurrect Lazarus so they'd believe in the resurrection of humanity."

LAUREANO: "And I think he also said that so they'd see that he doesn't have to depend on himself, that he's not just one person."

I: "That thanksgiving he prays aloud so that the people will hear it, not so that God will hear it, as he explains right here. We, too. Our thanksgiving in the Mass (Eucharist means 'thanksgiving'), we say it for ourselves; God doesn't need words, but we need those words."

After saying this, he cried: "Lazarus, come out of there!" And the dead man came out with his hands and feet tied with bandages and his face wrapped in a shroud. Jesus said to them: "Untie him and let him go."

FELIPE: "That's what Jesus was going to do with humanity, untie it from its bonds."

OLIVIA: "Each country that gets liberated is being resuscitated."

OSCAR: "He had to do that to show that death doesn't destroy people when they love. When you die they bury you and they don't see you alive anywhere. And so he had to do that, giving them a sample, really, when he took him out of that cave: death can't harm you if you have love."

MANUEL: "They used to bury people in caves then."

FELIPE: "The cover was a rock, it wasn't a glass cover."

I: "Death is like a bond, and Jesus has shown that he has come to untie humanity from those bonds of death. And that's what he is doing *now*, to those who believe in him. But for twenty centuries Christians have gone on believing like Martha: that the resurrection won't come until 'the last day.'"

"And why would it be that, like it says here, when Jesus arrived, Martha said to Mary *secretly:* 'The Master is here and calls you'?"

WILLIAM: "It must be because he was going around in secret. Earlier it was told that when Jesus was going to appear at Lazarus' house, Thomas

said: ‘Well, let's go and die with him.’”

OLIVIA: “He risks his life to resurrect Lazarus. And from that time on they were looking how to kill him.”

“And also this can be an image of what he came to do in the world, to give his life so we could all be resurrected with him. All of us with him.”

I: “Resurrection is all of humanity together, and resurrection, as Oscar says, is made by love. This reminds me of a poem by the Peruvian poet Cesar Vallejo: he says that a fighter died and a man came and said to him: ‘Don't die, I love you so much!’ But the corpse stayed dead. And two men came and they said to him: ‘Don't leave us! Come back to life!’ But the corpse stayed dead. And twenty people came, a hundred, a thousand, five hundred thousand crying: ‘So much love, with no power against death!’ But the corpse stayed dead. Millions of people surrounded him, with a common plea: ‘Stay with us, brother!’ But the corpse stayed dead. Then all the people on earth surrounded him; the sad, disturbed corpse saw them; he got up slowly, embraced the first person and began to walk.”

Several people said it was a very beautiful poem.

And we stopped there.

93.

The Alabaster Bottle

(Matthew 26:6–13)

It was in Bethany. When they were sitting at the table a girl approached Jesus and poured perfume on his head.

> *When the disciples saw this, they were angry and they began to say: "Why this waste? This could have been sold for much money to help the poor."*

WILLIAM: "Maybe they were thinking she was bewitching him."

OSCAR: "If they'd sold it, it would have gone to only a small number of the poor, and the poor of the world are countless. On the other hand, when she offered it to Jesus, she was giving it, in his person, to all the poor. That made it clear it was Jesus we believe in. And believing in Jesus makes us concerned about other people, and we'll even get to create a society where there'll be no poor. Because if we're Christians there shouldn't be any poor."

I: "John, in telling this, says that the one who was criticizing was Judas, and he says that Judas said it because he was in charge of the money and that he was a 'thief.' And he also adds that Judas calculated that it was worth about 300 *denarii* (which is about 1,000 pesos)."

OLIVIA: "It would seem that the one who said that said it sincerely, but it was hypocrisy, because he wasn't going to give it to the poor. Just like now, what an abundance of things there are, and the poor don't even get a whiff of anything."

WILLIAM: "Everything should really have been given to the poor, not just that perfume, so there was no reason for criticism."

GLORIA: “Maybe if she'd poured the perfume on herself nobody would have criticized her.”

TERESITA: “It's possible that he'd done her some favor, some miracle, and the only way she found of thanking him was to perfume him.”

I: “It seems that this girl, that John in his version calls Mary, is the same Mary Magdalene out of whom Jesus cast seven devils.”

ALEJANDRO: “An expensive prostitute, it seems she was, one of the expensive ones.”

WILLIAM: “Yes, because she was carrying a very precious bottle.”

ALEJANDRO: “Possibly she saw herself as a slave, an exploited one, and saw in him her liberation.”

TERESITA: “But why does she have to have been middle class? She could have been a poor prostitute, a working girl.”

WILLIAM: “But all that perfume. And the bottle. The alabaster bottle!”

I: “The alabaster bottle was sealed, and it had to be broken to use the perfume. The perfume could be used only once. And the Gospel says the whole house was filled with the fragrance of nard. It's believed that nard was an ointment that came from India.”

TERESITA: “Maybe a smuggler paid her with that.”

MARIA: “Jesus was a poor man, too, and he too deserved to have the perfume poured on him.”

I: “And worse off than poor, for they were going to kill him two days later. In the passage before this, Jesus said that it was two days to Passover. And in the following passage it's told that Judas went away from there to make the bargain to sell him.”

A student from Managua: “The Magdalene was used to that perfumed life, and things like that, and so she's being grateful according to her way of life. She's accustomed to a life of perfumes, jewels, carousing. And she pours perfume on him because that's the life she led, she thinks that's logical.”

WILLIAM: “She's accustomed to squander everything on the man she loves. And she doesn't have that economical mentality of the others. She squanders it right there. And she's not making economical calculations, like Judas.”

DONALD: “The criticism must have been because that perfume was one of the most costly, but for her it was still cheap to spend it on Jesus, because of

what Jesus had done for her earlier. She wasn't paying even a quarter of what she owed him."

JOSE, Maria's husband, who works in the San Jose Bank: "But Jesus hasn't forgotten the poor, because notice that in the following verse he says they will always have the poor among them. He means that if they want to help the poor they can be helping them a lot, later. They'll have the opportunity to give everything to the poor."

> *Jesus heard this and said to them: "Why do you bother this woman? This thing that she has done is a good thing. The poor you will always have among you, but you will not always have me."*

BOSCO: "That's stupid."

LAUREANO: "That's a pretty weak answer because to say you're always going to have the poor is pretty silly."

I: "But isn't it true that we've always had them?"

LAUREANO: "But we're not always *going* to have them."

WILLIAM: "This is a phrase much used by reactionaries to say there'll always have to be poor people, because Christ said so. The world can't change, because according to Jesus there'll always have to be rich and poor."

I: "He doesn't say there'll always be poor. Let's read it again."

MYRIAM reads: "The poor you will always have among you."

WILLIAM: "And the 'always'? How must we interpret that 'always'?"

I: "Very simply. As long as there are poor, they will always be among us, we shall not be separated from them. Because the Christian community must be with the poor."

WILLIAM: "But there's that 'always.' Are there always going to be poor people? That's what disturbs me."

I: "He says they are never going to be separated from the poor. That's not the same as saying there'll never stop being poor people. As long as there are poor, they'll always have them at their side, and among them."

TOMAS PEÑA: "When there's no more poor they won't."

A student: "I've got it! He says 'among you.' He's referring to *them*, to his disciples, but that doesn't mean there'll never fail to be poor; he's not talking to all of humanity."

LAUREANO: “Well, it *was* the disciples that he was saying that to. The disciples always have to be among the poor; they couldn't be among the rich.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “There's lots of ways of being poor: a poor person can be somebody with an arm missing. A poor person is somebody born stupid, or an orphan child, without parents. These will be in the community. There'll always be people like that in need, but of course if we're Christians they won't be poor, in poverty; if they're among us, that is, we won't let them perish.”

NATALIA: “Like what's happened in Cuba, where they treat the orphan children with enormous affection, and the insane, the old folks, the crippled, the widows. They're all cared for.”

OLIVIA: “It could also be that he was telling them instead, it seems to me, that there wouldn't be rich people, that everybody had to become poor. That there must be only poor people. That's what socialism claims. The revolution isn't so we'll all be rich but so we'll all be poor, so there'll be enough for everybody. Not disastrous poor but comfortable poor, tidy, clean, with medicine, with human dignity.”

“Or is it maybe that since there'll always be progress there'll always be new needs and there'll always be people that are needy? Those would be the poor.”

I: “That's what the reactionaries say. That even though there may be a lot of progress in humanity there'll always be a difference between rich and poor. That there'll never be a perfect society, a society all equal.”

FELIPE: “It seems that if things are well distributed there can't be any rich; then everybody's poor.”

I: “Jesus is referring to the beggars. It's for the beggars that, according to Judas, they should have sold the perfume. And it seems to me that's not a good prophecy of Jesus, and that it contradicts his announcement of the kingdom of heaven, saying that we'd always have beggars with us. I think what he's saying is that he's going away but that in place of him the poor are left. What that woman was doing with him, they'd have to do later with the poor, because he wasn't going to be there any longer, or rather, we were going to have his presence in the poor. But can it be forever that he'll not be there? The Gospel speaks of a second coming. He was going away and he was coming back.”

FELIPE: “When there's that society that we dream about, that's when he's coming back, and we'll have him, and there won't be any poor people.”

I: “Helpless orphans, people who have to go begging, or that sleep under a tree, or die in the streets the way the consumptives die in Managua, that's what's not going to exist when he comes. People for whom you ought to sell a bottle of perfume if you have one. All this now has disappeared in Cuba, and in all the other socialist countries. What supporters of capitalistic inequality say, that there will always be poor, has already stopped being true in socialist countries.”

ELVIS: “Then there'll be no need to sell any bottles of perfume, and people can use those perfumes, like that alabaster bottle, if they think it's useful to use those perfumes.”

MYRIAM: “And pouring perfume on anybody will be the same as pouring it on Christ.”

I: “So you can answer these people who defend inequality: there will always be poor people as long as Jesus isn't here. But when there's only equality and justice, and no needy, no beggars, Jesus will be with us again.”

WILLIAM: “This passage has also been used to justify big spending for luxury in churches. Because Jesus accepted the pouring of perfume on him. But right here it says that afterwards we'd have to do that with the poor; we couldn't do it to him in church because he wasn't going to be with us in person.”

OSCAR: “He wasn't going to be with us in person? He was going to be with us in the person of others.”

OLIVIA: “What that woman did was a lesson for us, and a reminder, so that what's spent in great temples that are good for nothing can be better spent on people, on the poor people he left behind. Now we do have to give to the poor, because the poor are present with us. What she had present was Jesus, his person; now we have him present but in the person of the poor.”

FELIPE: “Those who now want to spend a lot on church buildings and not on the poor, they're repeating what Judas did in opposing pouring perfume on Jesus. Judas did it because he wanted to get the money, and the people that now want all the spending for the churches, it's for the same reason, because they live off that money. They're thieves.”

WILLIAM: “What he's trying to tell them is that they're worrying about something silly, and they're not worrying about all the perfume that's been poured onto other stupid things.”

I: “And that they're going to go on having poor people. And besides, they're not going to do anything for them.”

WILLIAM: “He's telling them they don't do a damned thing for the poor.”

OLIVIA: “I also see there, in that woman's attitude, the change in her. It seems to me that for that woman the most valuable thing she's found among her possessions is that alabaster. She's changed her attitude and from that day on she's begun to love, and she's given up the best thing she has. It seems to me that it's also a very good lesson for the bourgeoisie, because poor people don't have anything to give, only love; but for people that do have, Magdalene's lesson is very important: give up what you have, and it's no good to be beating your chest and giving lots of charity to a church, and not give what you have to the poor. She looked at Jesus, she saw him humbler than herself, and more deserving to use that alabaster, that fragrance, and she put the perfume on Jesus. It seems to me that she intended to give herself, all of herself, with that perfume. She looked at him: Jesus looked like a poor man, like a proletarian, because he never was in those big mansions with rich clothes or anything; so she saw him with that simplicity and that humility, and he deserved the best there was.”

ALEJANDRO: “Besides, he must have needed that cleaning up.”

I: “That perfume that they poured on people was like a deodorant, because there was no running water then; people weren't always bathing. And Jesus must have been, we might say, just a little smelly.”

“What this woman has done, in pouring this perfumed oil on my body, is to prepare me for my burial.”

FELIPE: “Maybe because they wouldn't pour any on him when they killed him.”

I: “He is predicting his violent death, without a normal burial. He really wasn't embalmed. When the women arrived with ointments on the third day (and this Mary was with them), he was no longer there. And could it not be that she was doing this on purpose, foreseeing what was soon going to happen to him, and Jesus understood her purpose? Because in the previous passage Jesus had told his friends that it was two days until Passover, and that he was going to be delivered up to the Romans.”

In truth I tell you, that wherever this good news is announced throughout the world, what this woman did will also be told, so that you may remember her.

I: “But at the same time he foresees his immediate death, he foresees that his good news about liberation will be announced throughout the whole world. And that whenever his violent death is remembered, with no funeral, like the death of any subversive, they will remember what that woman did, as part of the good news.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that the remembering is for us also to do what she did. So that we do it now, not to him anymore, but to the poor. Or to him in the person of the poor. That's why we must remember her. That woman gave up a luxury. She was used to that kind of life, to those luxuries. As I see it, when she poured that very expensive perfume on Jesus she was giving up all her luxuries and squanderings and that's why Jesus defended her from the criticism. You ought to see how the bourgeois live and what they spend on perfumes and clothes and on the mansions they live in and on their automobiles. And her example and the lesson that Jesus is giving is that you have to give now to the poor.”

“And people like us who don't have perfumes or luxurious things to give because we're poor?”

FELIPE: “We can give other valuable things that we have.”

LAUREANO: “We can offer our lives as Jesus did. Then it'll be also for us, that perfume that the woman poured on Jesus.”

94.

The Question about Resurrection

(Luke 20:27–40)

The Sadducees, who the Gospel says didn't believe in resurrection, presented Jesus with the problem of the woman who had seven legitimate husbands. Which of them will be her husband at the resurrection?

I said that the Sadducees were the priestly party of the aristocracy, even more conservative than the Pharisees, who were the priestly party of the middle class. It was through their conservatism that they didn't believe in resurrection, for they accepted only the first five Books of the Bible (the Pentateuch), and in them the concept of resurrection does not appear, for it is a late concept in the Bible. Politically they were allied to the Romans, and they were the most strongly opposed to any messianic movement of the people that would endanger their privileges. I said also that as Marcos Joya, Manuel's brother, had just died, today's passage was very opportune, dealing with the problem of resurrection.

> *Then Jesus answered them: "In this world men and women marry. But those who deserve to reach that other world and to be resurrected from among the dead, will not marry there, for they can no longer die."*

OSCAR: "So you get married to die, right?"

ANDREA, his wife: "It seems to me that it's because here we have bodies, there we're going to have just spirits."

I: "For the Jews, and for Christ, there was no distinction between soul and body, as there was for the Greeks, who said that the soul came out from

the ‘prison’ of the body. According to biblical thinking, resurrection, if it existed, had to be complete and material. We might say that they had a materialistic, ‘Marxist,’ concept of the resurrection. The reason why there won't be marriages, says Jesus, is because they can't die.”

OSCAR: “I understand, Ernesto, why here, because of death, there's a wish to marry. It seems that there, since there'll be no more death, there'll be no wish to marry. There'll always be love, right? But no longer with any thought of sex.”

I: “In fact, Christ doesn't say there will be no more love but that they won't marry because there will be no need to have children (because there will be no death).”

DON TOMAS PEÑA: “It seems there'll always be love. But having children, like here on earth, it seems to me that won't be seen, right?”

I: “As life dies, ever since life appeared on earth, reproduction had to be invented so we could maintain ourselves. But once there's no death, there's no need for reproduction. We can also say the opposite: there are births because there is death. If life didn't die we wouldn't have been born; and we must die so that others can be born. Because there is death there has been the enormous evolution of life. Life has been able to evolve from the first cell to the human being through the infinite number of births that there have been. And we too must die so that there will be more evolution of life. But it seems to me that resurrection will be like the last stage of evolution (at some point there has to be a last stage) in which there will no longer be a need for more evolution, and there will be no need for more births. There nobody will be born any more, and therefore there is no more sex, and also because nobody dies any more.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “And also because there'll be no evil gossip, it seems to me. Because that does us a lot of harm. Because people say: Look at that man and woman, there they are living together and with a bunch of kids and they don't get married. Isn't that so? And so, then, well, it's better to get married. You say: So people won't talk about me. But there, it seems to me it's different. To live in love, then, that's healthy there.”

OLIVIA: “I believe it's because there'll be another marriage, not like the marriages of this world, of two individuals, but a marriage of all humanity with God (who is love).”

FELIPE, Tomas’ son: “I want to ask one thing, Ernesto: what will happen to marriage in a totally perfect society?”

I: “If there is still death, there will be reproduction. But I believe it still won't be totally perfect if there is death. And what good would that society be to us if we won't see it because we'll be dead? But Jesus tells us that we'll be living. The reason why that society interests us is that we'll be part of it. For humanity to be all united is a necessary condition for us to be alive. In this translation Jesus speaks of two worlds: this one and the other one. But in Greek he doesn't speak of two worlds, but of two ‘aeons’: aeons are epochs or eras of the world, and Jesus speaks of this aeon and of the new aeon.”

ESPERANZA: “Why would he say, Ernesto, ‘those who deserve to reach that other world’?”

I: “They are the ones who love. They will be alive in the love of the society of the future.”

For they are like angels, and they are like children of God through having been resurrected.

OSCAR: “Does it mean that we who haven't suffered death aren't children of God?”

I: “In the Bible the angels are specially called children of God. I think what he is saying is that we shall be like the angels through having been resurrected, and we shall be more especially children of God then, like Christ himself.”

LAUREANO: “He says that those who are resurrected, they're going to be the children of God, those who obeyed God's commandments, and the ones who aren't resurrected, those people died!”

TOMAS: “If you don't lead a crooked life but give your friendship to others, if you love everybody, you're already right now beginning to live the resurrection, then.”

OSCAR: “Yes, I agree with that, too, because I'm beginning to think that to be able to rise again you ought to begin to rise now in this life, first. In order to be able to have the hope of resurrection, I say, of God. But if you die in selfishness, what hope do you have!”

ALEJANDRO: “But the death they're talking about here isn't the death of sin or anything else; it's the death of the body.”

I: “Yes, but we're seeing that resurrection is something you begin to have, right in this life, in embryo. Saint Paul says the transformation of our

bodies will be like that of a seed into a plant. But Saint Paul also insults members of a group that said that the resurrection ‘already happened’ (that it was symbolic).”

ALEJANDRO: “And what it says here about that they're going to be like angels; what's ‘angels’?”

LAUREANO (laughing): “Well, I've seen some painted ones with wings.”

ALEJANDRO: “Oh, well, those aren't the ones being talked about here. Maybe he's talking about a change of matter. Of course, your body is transformed after you die; it's a natural process. Then, maybe something more perfect comes out, in another form.”

I: “I don't know what they are, but I believe we can think of them as forces or powers of the cosmos.”

OSCAR: “I think that business about angels that it says there is that maybe you're going to be without sin; you're going to be pure, pure love especially.”

CARLOS: “The angels could be other beings who also had their trial on another planet now disappeared and who are now glorified. Because we can't be the only beings, there must be others in other places.”

I: “We have no reason to think that a human being is the most perfect being in the universe. In our galaxy there are 250 million suns that can have planets like the earth, and there are billions of galaxies in the firmament. And there are stars that are much older than the sun, and they can have civilizations several million years more advanced than ours. One of the scientists who took part in the launching of Viking II to Mars has said he believes it's possible that we're receiving messages from beings very superior to ourselves, and that we don't notice them. He even believes it's possible that there are intelligent beings who can live in the midst of interstellar space and even in the heart of the stars. If this were so, those beings would be ‘spiritual’ for us. In reality we know very little about matter. It's curious that in the Bible angels are called the ‘army of heaven’ and God is therefore the ‘God of the armies.’ In the Book of Job it says that when God created the earth all the children of God (the angels) sang with jubilation on the stars of the dawn. In the narrative that Mark writes of this Gospel passage, Jesus tells the Sadducees they have asked him that question about resurrection because ‘they do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.’ It seems to me he's telling them there that they don't know the possibilities there are in the cosmos. The fact is that, according to the Bible,

there are beings superior to us, and Jesus says that resurrection will be to be like them. The Sadducees didn't believe in angels, either. Perhaps that's exactly why Jesus mentions them, to make them see that one thing has something to do with the other."

> *Even Moses himself, in the passage about the burning bush, makes us see that the dead come to life. There he says that the Lord is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. But God is the God not of the dead but of the living; since for him all are the living*.

DONALD: "Well, they had died but they went on living."

ELVIS: "It occurs to me that the ones that God says are the living are the ones who lived for the people, and they were living in the people. Like Camilo Torres or Che Guevara, who still live, they are a living strength in the people."

TOMAS: "Well, for God they are living. It seems to me that they're living, or rather that God keeps them alive, because of all they've done, all they've saved. And God sees them very clearly."

OSCAR: "It's great news that the dead are alive."

TOMAS: "They haven't ended, because since God loves them, and is remembering them, they're alive for God. As we were just saying (it's a comparison), I remember when William was here. I always remember him, and I say: he'll also be thinking of us off there."

I: "As Tomas says, we remember William and Teresita who are in Peru, and then they are present in us. Something similar happens with the resurrected, but it's not because people remember them but because they are living in God's thought: they are present in the consciousness of the universe."

CARLOS: "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been given a promise. And if they were dead, how could their promise be fulfilled?"

I: "And those names represent all of humanity that has died waiting for the promise of total revolution. Now Jesus is quoting from a book in which the Sadducees did indeed believe. At first sight, Jesus' reasoning seems illogical; it seems that Jesus is only clutching one little word: that God didn't say 'I was' but 'I am the God of Abraham.' He might have found more serious arguments; maybe he's kidding them a little. But it also seems to me that Jesus' reasoning is more profound: that since the Patriarchs were

friends of God, they go on being God's friends, and then they're alive. Also, Yahweh told Moses (when Yahweh appeared for the first time in history) to tell the people that Yahweh was the God of their forebears, of their past, of their history; Jesus is now saying that the people of the past continue to live, because the God of history is also the God of the future. To be alive for God is to be alive for the future."

OSCAR: "We mustn't be afraid of death, then, because death is nothing."

DON TOMAS: "It seems to me that I'm afraid of sickness. Even though I'm not sick, but a comrade is, and he is seriously ill, and I'm thinking about him: Poor So-and-So, I say."

FELIPE: "What's important is for us to love in this life so that we can live in that love which is the life of God."

OSCAR: "Of course we mustn't fear death. But we must love. Because if I'm going to die without love, if I'm isolated from everybody, from the people, of course I have to fear death. But if I'm here and we're trying to find out how to join together in love, why should I be afraid of death?"

I: "We save ourselves like that, together, united, in a unity that's the betrothal of humanity with God, as Olivia has said. And we'll be a single organism in which there will no longer be a woman who has lost seven husbands, or husbands who have lost their wives, or single men or single women. We shall be a single body that gets betrothed."

Then some teachers of the law said to him: "Well said, Master." And they did not dare to ask him any other questions.

All were silent. Then TOMAS said: "Anybody got anything else to say?"

Nobody else had a comment. I concluded by saying: "It's clear that even the teachers of the law were happy at the answer that Jesus gave to the Sadducees. They were very unpopular. They were the priestly nobility, the rich families. In the first books of the Bible, which were for them the only ones, it was thought that the dead existed like shadows in Sheol, but they weren't living. Since to the Jews a person was not composed of body and soul but of body and life infused by God, the dead were separated from Yahweh, and Yahweh wasn't concerned with the dead. Therefore the blessings of God consisted of a long life heaped with riches. But later, the people oppressed by the rich, or in exile, began to think differently. It was especially during the guerrilla fighting of the Maccabees that faith in

resurrection appears clearly. The guerrilla fighters are sure that those who die for freedom will go on living. The Sadducees, then, because they were rich and reactionary, did not believe in resurrection, only in the enjoyment of their riches. I recently read an interview with a Marxist atheist in which he said that the belief in the resurrection of the dead is very revolutionary and anyone who believes in anything as daring as that has no reason to doubt any other transformation that humanity can have."

95.

The Most Important Commandment

(Mark 12:28–34)

Then came also one of the teachers of the law, who had heard them discussing, and as he knew that Jesus had answered them well, he asked him: "Which is the first of all the commandments?"

I: "The teachers of the law, also called doctors of the law, or scribes, almost always appear in the Gospels as evil people. They are frequently compared with the Pharisees. They were like the theologians or the moralists; and with the priests they were the religious leaders. (In the Gospels there is mention of a scribe who wanted to follow Jesus, but that isn't said of any priest.) This teacher, it seems that he approached with good intentions because he saw that Jesus, in the discussion on the resurrection that he had with the Sadducees, a very conservative, aristocratic, and priestly group, had 'answered them well.' This scribe's question, about which commandment is most important, was of great interest, for the Jews had more than six hundred religious commandments."

Jesus answered: "The first commandment of all is: 'Listen, Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. So love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second is like it, and it is: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment more important than these."

ELVIS: “To love the poor, the oppressed, is to be loving God. And that is the commandment we must obey.”

I: “But why does he talk, then, about loving God? He could just have said love your neighbor.”

ELVIS: “Well, God is your neighbor; God's the people.”

FELIPE: “I think he's saying that you have to love your neighbor like you love God.”

I: “Yes, but in any case he talks about loving God. And he considers it so important that he puts it together with love of neighbor, and even ahead of it.”

We thought awhile. Then I said: “God appears before the people of Israel freeing them from the slavery of Egypt. And he gives them some laws so that they would be a just society and so that they wouldn't oppress one another as they were formerly oppressed by the Egyptians. And he wants the people to be faithful to him and not to recognize other gods of other societies, which do not represent any liberation. So to love him is to love liberation and justice and that's the same thing as to love your neighbor. To love God, then, is to love love. And therefore it's logical that the second commandment should be very similar to the first one. I also note that phrase that God is ‘the only Lord’: I see that that commandment is not to have other gods, not to have idols. The commandment is that there is no other God than love. And that is why we must love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, with all our strength. And the second commandment is the same, because if it weren't the same, with what love are you going to love your neighbor if you're loving God with all the love you have?”

FELIPE: “To love your neighbor then is to love God. You can't love God without practicing justice. And you can't love your neighbor without practicing that justice that God commands.”

GLORIA: “I think Jesus made him see that if we love God and don't love our neighbor, we're really not loving God.”

I: “The two commandments were in the Bible; in the Bible it also said you have to love your neighbor like yourself, including foreigners among your neighbors. What was original in Jesus, and what was very revolutionary and what must have scandalized a lot of people, was joining the two things and saying that one was similar to the other.”

ELVIS: “We agree, then, that loving your neighbor is already loving God, right?”

LAUREANO: “Because God is humanity. They are equal. (Some of us believe, then, that they are the same thing. Or that it's God, that humanity is God.)”

I: “No, I believe that what we should say is that God is love among people. That God does exist, but that God doesn't exist in another way, separated from love among people, as God is usually imagined. God exists, but God exists among us only in that form: as mutual love.”

FELIPE: “I think that's why Christ says that to that teacher of the law, because they used to be confused and thought that God was a God separated from the people. That you could commit injustices and then light a bunch of candles to God. At that time they thought God was a personage separated from people.”

I went on: “I believe we cannot say that God is people. That would mean that Hitler or Pinochet are God because they are people.”

LAUREANO: “Humanity loving each other and united, that's what God is. Just societies are the ones that can see God. Not those sons of bitches. Those bastards are outside of God.”

ELVIS: “Where there's a community and everybody's united and lives in community, that's the real God, right?”

I: “That's why I said that God is the love that unites people.”

ELVIS: “If that's clear, everything's clear.”

DOÑA NATALIA, Elvis's mother: “I don't know, but it seems to me that, as I'm a bit ill I can say something crazy. I believe that love between husband and wife is love of God.”

I: “Jesus says the second is very much like the first. You can say, then, that those that obey the second, it's as if they're obeying the first. Those who don't love God, for example, because they don't believe in God, but love their neighbor, according to Christ it's as if they're obeying the first commandment. Since one is similar to the other, it's like saying that it's equal. And he stresses this equality when he says, putting them on the same plane, that ‘there is no other commandment more important than these.’ I also think that to love God above all things is not to make any thing into God, or not to make a thing of God, and from that comes the ban on making images of God. The only image of God is a human being, according to the

Bible. And as God is love, to love God ‘above all things’ is like loving humans, and therefore the first commandment is like the second.”

> *Then the teacher of the law said: “Well said, Master. It is true what you say that there is only one God, and that there is no other except God. And that to love God with all one's heart, with all one's understanding, with all one's soul and with all one's strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself is worth more than all the sacrifices and all the offerings that are burned on the altar.”*

I: “The teacher of the law repeats what Christ said, with the addition that there is only one God and there is no *other*. Maybe this is a little like what Laureano was saying, that we can't imagine a false God, a God that is not love. God *is* love, justice, and there is no other. And this man adds also something more radical, which Jesus hadn't said: that this love is worth more than religion. That's what he means by the things that he mentions: ‘all the sacrifices and all the offerings that are burned on the altar.’ He got the idea. And Jesus agrees with him. And another interesting thing: he has understood that love of God and of others is a single thing, when he joins them in a single phrase and says that that is superior to religion.”

IVAN: “He's saying that it's better to give your life for the people than to give money to build a temple.”

MANUEL: “That's very good. Because what the rich do is give some money to the bishop to build a baptismal font and the people are starving to death.”

FELIPE: “That teacher was seeing that those sacrifices and those offerings were false rites, because they were a bunch of exploiters, hypocrites.”

I: “But here he's not talking only about false rites but true rites. He says that love is worth more than all religious rites.”

MANUEL: “This doesn't mean we should abandon all the rest.”

I: “What rest?”

MANUEL: “Well, church and all that.”

I: “But isn't that what you were saying?”

MANUEL: “Not about myself, but about others who burn candles.”

I: “And is there any value in that?”

MANUEL (laughing): “Maybe God likes smoke.”

I: “And this Gospel, what does it say?”

MANUEL: “Well, yes, here it says the opposite. But if I'm really loving my neighbor, I can be doing those things even if they're secondary.”

I: “Here it doesn't say you mustn't do them. It says the other is more important.”

MANUEL: “Yes, I agree.”

FELIPE: “And it's not a sin to fail to do them.”

I: “And that you can also have no religion, right? Even when it talks here about ‘all the sacrifices and all the offerings that are burned on the altar,’ it seems to me that the tone is a little contemptuous.”

MARIITA: “Yes, of course, religion must serve for love of our neighbor. That's worth more than anything.”

LAUREANO: “Religion is the opium of the people.”

Then, when Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him: “You are not far from the kingdom of God.”

MANUEL: “Well, he wasn't far from love; he was getting to love. Maybe he wasn't loving yet, but he was getting there.”

OLIVIA: “At other times we've seen that people are saved by people. Whether people are saved depends on their relationships with people. We see it in that business about the Last Judgment: ‘For I was hungry and they fed me.’ It means then that everything is related to people. Forgetting that is what has harmed us, and that's why there's so much injustice, so much hunger. We've lived through a traditional religion of baptismal fonts, as Manuel says, of candles, and we forget love, which is what can save us. Love of our neighbor is what saves us. And meanwhile there have been people who don't even mention God and they've sacrificed themselves and died for the love of neighbors. It means that that is fundamental and that it's been useless, that religion full of lies that we've had and that they have in many countries.”

I: “So Christ shows us here, then, what the kingdom of heaven is: love among neighbors. And he tells that teacher of the law that he is not far from it, with what he has said.”

And no one dared ask him more questions.

OLIVIA: “Maybe because they had understood everything, and they saw that that was an awkward situation for them, and if Jesus went on talking to

them the situation would get worse. They didn't want to go on hearing that kind of thing."

I: "They probably didn't like what was being said about sacrifices, offerings, something like what Laureano has said—right?—about religion being the opium of the people, and they didn't want to question him any more."

GUSTAVO, the Colombian: "Yes, I agree with what Laureano says, and they must have been startled at those new ideas, right? That all their rites, the animals they sacrificed, the incense they burned, and all that was valueless. Then they didn't want to ask him any more questions because they were afraid; what Christ was saying was too revolutionary."

I: "And possibly because they didn't know what to answer. He was talking here about the Bible; this was the thought of the Bible, the teacher of the law understood it very well, and the others must have understood. Many Christians also understand this, and they don't like to hear it."

"But we mustn't blame people that live in this traditional religion because this is what they've been taught. I'm thinking of my parents, who are very good people, but they've been taught this and they've known nothing else."

ALEJANDRO: "Many Jews used to go to make their sacrifices to the temple in good faith. Mary and Joseph also took Jesus to the temple, to make those sacrifices, when he got lost on them."

LAUREANO: "Don Tomas hasn't said anything."

Old DON TOMAS: "I was paying attention to what was being said. What you've been saying is very good, and I didn't have anything to say, so I'd better be quiet. (after a pause) As for that business about the offerings: I don't think they had the offerings in those times that we have now. We used to do what we were told; we'd come with candles and this or that and we didn't understand, right? And as our parents taught us that, we had to do what they did. Now we've discovered a new law. I understand all that. I see that the old law that our parents had, we had to follow, because it was the one our parents taught. But now a law has come that is quite different, so now we have to obey another law. Not keep the same one, because that's wrong. That's why we come to church, to Mass. Instead of staying in the hammock listening to the radio. Because we have to listen and seek and see what the new one is like."

I: “In the Bible the opponent of God isn't atheism; it's the idols. The fact that ‘there is only one God,’ which we've seen here, means that we must not adore idols. And that was because all pagan religions were alienating. Only Yahweh liberates. In Psalm 82 God appears rebuking the gods because they are on the side of the oppressors, because they have not been just to the weak and orphaned, because they do not liberate the poor and the needy. The first commandment, says Christ, is like the second; it really *is* the second. Not to serve other gods means to love your neighbor, because it means to love only God, and love of God is achieved only through love of your neighbor. And it's a betrayal of the thought of Jesus to try to make two commandments and not one. It's not a question of loving God and loving your neighbor, but rather of loving God-neighbor as a single thing, because God can be loved only in your neighbor. What is said here is that love of God-in-neighbor is worth more than any worship of God.”

96.

The Eucharist

(Mark 14:12–25)

We commented on this Gospel at Holy Thursday Mass at about five in the afternoon. With us was a great Nicaraguan composer of popular songs and protest songs, Carlos Mejia Godoy, who was going to perform for the first time his “Peasant Mass,” which he had composed here in Solentiname. His presence had brought many people from San Carlos, especially young people. And we knew that some spies had also come.

The disciples asked Jesus where they were going to celebrate the Passover, and he told them:

> *Go to the city, and there you will find a man who is carrying a jug of water. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house: “The Master says: where is the room in which I am going to have Passover supper with my disciples?” Then he will show you a great room on the top floor, all ready; prepare for us there.*

CARLOS MEJIA GODOY: “Very mysterious. It seems to have been a clandestine supper.”

OLIVIA: “It seems he was trying to see that nobody knew where it was going to be, that even the disciples didn't know, above all because he no longer trusted Judas.”

I: “Yes. It's clear that he had made an arrangement with a certain person in Jerusalem, who had to be with a jug in a certain place. That was the signal. I suppose that a man with a jug of water would be something unusual, because it was the women who hauled water. The man was to go

into a house, and they were to follow him. And the Gospel says that Jesus and his disciples didn't arrive until it was already night. In those days he was already staying in hiding. He attacked the temple and went into hiding again. His hiding place was in the Gethsemane grove. After the supper, at midnight, he returned there. And the treachery of Judas was that he revealed the hiding place."

WILLIAM: "That Eucharist was a clandestine supper, and besides, some of them were armed, as the Gospel says also in another passage. The Passover supper was a commemoration of the Exodus, the liberation of the people, and here Jesus is beginning another Exodus, another liberation. And an authentic Eucharist, as long as there's injustice, has to be more or less underground. Like this one that we're celebrating today."

I explained that Passover was a very ancient feast of *campesinos* and shepherds who were celebrating the renewal of life in the spring. It was something like our Holy Week. The Israelites celebrated it each year in Egypt, where they were slaves. And once a leader, Moses, received from Yahweh the inspiration that they should go to the desert to celebrate Passover. And they went and did not return. If they had celebrated their Passover, their Holy Week, traditionally, like every year, they would have remained in slavery. History would not have changed and all the peoples on earth would still be enslaved, because the subjective conditions for a revolution would never have occurred. They freed themselves and from that came the freedom that all the peoples of earth enjoy. Everything started from the fact that the people did not return. A historic event took place that broke the mythical cycle that was repeated every year. 'Passover' is a Hebrew word that means 'passage,' 'jump,' 'flight,' that is: liberation. It was the passage to a new land of liberty. And Yahweh made a pact with the people in which the people promised to keep their faith in him, their freedom, to keep themselves free. And Yahweh ordered them to celebrate that feast every year, but in a different way: as the feast of their freedom ("that day will be for you a remembrance"). Each Israelite was expected to feel as though he or she personally came out of Egypt. But this feast was not to be a mere remembrance of the past. It was rather so that they would keep in mind that the same strength that freed them in the past would go on freeing them in the future from other imperialisms and also from internal oppressions, class struggles. Above all at that Passover they announced the coming of a Messiah, the new Moses who would definitively free the

people from all oppression. This supper was to sustain the people with its living consciousness of its devotion to freedom. And this is the supper that Jesus is going to have tonight with his disciples. The Passover supper also had a political character. The Jewish authorities were worried when Jesus went up to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. Pilate lived in Caesarea, but each year he went up to Jerusalem for Passover, because there might be disturbances. At the Passover supper, when they celebrated the past liberation, naturally they had to talk about politics. At the time of Christ they had to talk about the Roman Empire, about Herod. Just as during Holy Week, which is the continuation of that Passover, we talk of imperialism, of Somoza. The supper, for true Israelites, had a subversive character. But for others the Passover was already nothing but a ritual, a symbolic action, like the first feast of the renewal of nature that was repeated every year without changing history. At this feast Christ did something different, like Moses. He began a new Exodus, and he established a new alliance of the people with the force that freed it from Egypt, for a new liberation.

> *While they were eating, he took the bread, pronounced the thanksgiving and, after dividing it, gave it to them, saying: "Take; this is my body." Then he took a goblet and, after the thanksgiving, gave it to them, and all drank from it. And he said to them: "This is my blood which confirms the new pact, and which is shed for the good of everyone."*

WILLIAM: "It seems to me that when he gave them that communion of bread and wine, the bread that is food and the wine that is joy, telling them it was his body and it was his blood, and 'go on doing this,' it was so that we would repeat also his sacrifice for the cause of the poor. That is, giving his life. This is my body was equivalent to saying this is my life, and the same with blood. And he adds: 'my blood shed.' That's what he wanted us to repeat, not to repeat a ritual. And they had made a ritual out of the Eucharist."

I: "Right there Jesus wants to put an end to the ritual. Just as the other Passover had also been the abandonment of a ritual, converting a religious celebration into a political act. Passover, which had again become a ritual, is used by Christ for a political, economic, and social liberation of humanity.

His intention was not that we should celebrate a Holy Week ritual every year, as we do in Nicaragua, while the people are still not free."

"Man, it seems to me we should put Holy Week to better use. Doing something for the people. So that after Holy Week is over we won't go back to our usual slavery."

I: "The first pact didn't last. The people chosen for liberty became a people of rich and poor. The prophets had announced that a new pact would be established between God and God's people. Pacts in ancient times were sealed with blood. The first pact was sealed with the blood of the paschal lamb. Christ at the supper says that his blood that he is going to shed is the blood of a new pact."

"That pact of God with people is also a pact of people among themselves, because we are left obliged to one another; it's a pact of love among people."

"We're far, far away from that pact in Nicaragua. Just look at the difference between rich and poor."

"What we've got is a contract for the exploitation of people by people."

"He gives us that bread that is his body delivered up by the people and that wine that is his blood shed by the people, so that we may all be a single body and a single blood, all be a single equality. Some shouldn't be more than others. Because his blood, he shed it for everybody; it's a blood that unites us all, I believe."

"With that bread and that wine he wants to tell us that wherever it is shared he is present."

CARLOS MEJIA GODOY: "When William spoke and mentioned the word 'communion' something occurred to me that I'd never thought of before: that communion isn't only a sacrament. It's also like when we say 'I'm in complete communion with so-and-so's ideas' (an ideological communion). And Christ wanted us really to commune with one another this way; and this communion, this union, will make us afterwards have everything in common."

ALEJANDRO: "But those who are preventing the union of people, the exploiters, can't participate in this Eucharist."

DONALD: "The supporters of this system have kept the old rituals, with the Holy Weeks. You've got to fast. You can't eat meat from a hairy animal. In many places, not only in Nicaragua, throughout Latin America, they've

kept these rituals, and they don't break out of the system, the system is always eating into us.”

I: “The feast is celebrated on the same date in the lunar month on which the Israelites celebrated it before leaving Egypt, according to a very ancient tradition, but the bad part is that it's still celebrated with the same spirit: it's an annual symbolic resurrection while the people continue in slavery. In Cuba the celebration of the victory of Playa Girón, April 19, coincides roughly with Holy Week, which is the full moon of the spring equinox. This annoys many Catholics because they think the revolution is trying to replace one celebration by another. The first time I went to Cuba it coincided exactly with Good Friday, which had annoyed them even more, because all the schoolchildren were celebrating Girón and not Good Friday. But I thought there was no cause for annoyance in that; they too were celebrating a passage, a passover: the exodus from capitalism. But they were celebrating a real liberation, while the reactionary Catholics who lost nothing at Playa Girón were celebrating a ritual liberation.”

“Celebrating Easter with the old ritualism is like saying that we've returned to Egypt again.”

OLIVIA: “At this supper Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples to show that there shouldn't be classes, but this has become nothing more than a ceremony of Holy Week, when in the cathedrals the bishops wash the feet of twelve ‘apostles.’ People don't understand that Jesus didn't want to teach us a ceremony. While some people have huge feasts and waste food, others go to bed maybe half starved. There are so many, many people in the country who go to bed with no supper or little supper, and maybe little lunch as well. And in society there are some who are lords and others who are servants who wait on them.”

TOMAS PEÑA: “It's not that everybody's going to become a lord but that we all must serve each other, be servants of each other. Because the disciple can't be greater than the Master and the Master became a servant.”

FELIPE: “Until everybody in the country is the same.”

ESPERANZA: “The bishops wash feet, and the priests, too, and they let big things happen, big injustices, big exploitations, and they're always washing feet. Well, at least here we're changing all that, at least we're looking for something else. At least now they say to you: ‘Hey! Where you going, daddy? You going to Solentiname? What you going to do there?’ At least here it's something else.”

I: “As we were saying before, the oppressors can't take part in this communion, those who have grabbed the goods that belong to everyone. Saint Paul reproached the Corinthians that in their banquets some ate a great deal and others went hungry. What the Church did was to suppress the banquets because it couldn't suppress the class divisions. That's why Father Camilo Torres was so right when he said that only with the revolution could we have a valid Eucharist. The first Christians called the Eucharist by the Greek word *Koinonia*, which is the same word with which they named the community of goods that they had. And it's because communion and communism are the same thing. From the most ancient times the Greeks had talked of communism and they gave it the name that the Christians used afterwards to say ‘communion’: *Koinonia.”*

WILLIAM: “Which sounds like ‘company.’ But now the word ‘company’ (and we already have one here in Solentiname) means just the opposite.”

GIANANTONIO (a young Italian who is spending awhile with us): “I believe the logical consequence of the Eucharist is that people have everything in common. Until they live in communion they can't celebrate the true Eucharist that Christ began.”

I: “Camilo Torres said that was why he stopped saying Mass.”

FATHER JAIME (a Salesian priest, a visitor from Colombia): “Continuing what William was saying, which interests me very much because I hadn't heard it before, that Christ's intention was not that we should repeat a ritual: I see the Eucharist as a new kind of society. It seems to me that what has happened to the history of Christianity is the same as what happened to the history of humanity, according to Marx. That humanity at the beginning was communal, people helped one another, they held everything in common. The same with the first Christians. But Christianity later had to pass through the same stages as the rest of humanity: slavery, feudalism, capitalism. In some parts of America we haven't got beyond feudal society. In my country, for example, we find some priests who live like feudal lords, others like despots. But now there are many of us who understand that we must rebel against these oppressions of the Church, and we are trying to make the Church, with the rest of society, pass on to a new stage, socialism. But it has to be done clandestinely. What you are doing here can't be done in Managua's cathedral. In a simple, poor, peasants’ chapel, where the people feel the injustice that has been committed against them by making use of religion, people can understand the true sense of the Eucharist: that it

is mutual aid, it is solidarity, it is liberation. I was very impressed by what William had said, which I had really never heard in that way."

FELIPE: "The Church is very rich, as Comrade Jaime says, but the members of the Church, we get poorer and poorer; the old people are even beggars."

OLD TOMAS: "They're taking everything away from the people, even the land. There's very little land left for us."

"The land now belongs to the feudal lords."

YOUNG MYRIAM: "Just the opposite of communion."

DON JULIO: "Right here they're buying the land and people are leaving Solentiname."

ALEXANDER: "Yes, it's good to expose all that taking away of land. You can take away land without buying it. And another way is by buying it. Because this system pressures people to sell, at prices that the *campesinos* think are good but the buyers know are low. And that's a kind of taking away from you. They can buy it for a hundred or a hundred and fifty pesos an acre; but that's practically stealing it. The bank pressures the *campesinos* who are in debt to sell, and the same bank makes loans to the rich so they can buy."

BOSCO: "It's a well-planned robbery."

OLIVIA: "And what I see is that that institution of the Eucharist compromises everybody that takes communion. Although many believe that just by eating the host they're saving their souls, what's important is to realize the injustice that exists, and the exploitation. And that's why I've said it would be better to close the city churches, because they're no good, those big Masses, and those big communions: they make the people blinder, more asleep. Religion puts people to sleep. You go up to take communion and to take a candle and you feel tranquil, and injustice doesn't matter, you don't see it; all you saw was that you did your duty by praying, with your eyes closed, with all that seriousness. And the injustices, we don't see them; we don't see the deaths, the infant mortality, the lack of medicines, malnutrition, and all that. And that communion, that taking of wine and bread is to make people even blinder, the poor as well as the rich. Because even the poor say that it's 'God's will.'"

I: "There can be no communion as long as there are social classes, because you can't unite social classes, exploiters and exploited."

The manager of the National Bank of San Carlos: “I don't know, Father, to what extent it is true what they say that religion is the opium of the people. But the truth is that the priests have gradually instilled into the people that they must be patient because afterwards they're going to enjoy the kingdom of heaven up there. Why don't we make the kingdom happen right here? Instead of waiting for something that maybe doesn't exist. That's why young people have drawn away a little from religion. Nowadays there are priests like you who have more advanced ideas and who are orienting the people toward liberation; that's different, that's something new. But it used to be that the priests were always on the side of those who had the power.”

OLIVIA: “It's just like what the gentleman, the comrade, says, that it's been the leaders of the Church who are responsible for this conformity in the people. They've done this to get on the good side of the powerful, as he says, so they can get gifts, so they can receive good things. And besides they put fear into us. I remember when the priests used to come here: they were hard on people that didn't have anything; they'd come and scold them hard. Then everybody was filled with fear, taking communion to get saved, to be able to get to heaven. But in the Gospel it's clearly shown that the kingdom of God we're going to form is right here on earth; so we're seeing that this is different from the big lies they were making us believe: shut your mouth, you've got to be patient for heaven, wait till heaven. The kingdom is going to be made by us alone, and if we don't free ourselves we're not going to that heaven even if we're poor.”

I: “In the following verse there's mention of the kingdom of heaven. Those in Solentiname who have time to be studying the Gospel are very sure that the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of God established on earth. It's a kingdom in the future, but it's not a kingdom way off yonder. After he gave them the wine to drink, Jesus mentioned that kingdom:”

> *I tell you truly, you will not drink the product of the grape again until you drink the new wine in the kingdom of God*.

OLIVIA: “The kingdom of love, which is in this life.”

I: “I wonder what it means that he isn't going to drink wine until then.”

MARIITA: “It's like if we said we wouldn't take a drink until liberation comes. Only until the revolution triumphs, only until everything has

changed, will he have celebrations again.”

GIANANTONIO: “And that day he *will* celebrate with us.”

I: “It seems that he's saying that only then will the true feast come. And why does he speak of *new* wine?”

WILLIAM: “Very odd. Because, without knowing much about wine, I know that old wine is tastier.”

CARLOS MEJIA GODOY: “Or can it be the wine from a new harvest, from a new grape, can that be the new wine? A different wine; the new wine of a new person.”

I: “The Bible always insists on the *new*, because the Bible is revolutionary: we hear of a new person, new skies and a new earth, a new Jerusalem, a new canticle, a God that will make everything new, a new alliance, a new wine. All this means change, revolution, or, as we also say now, a new order.”

The bank manager: “This new society will take about a thousand years to arrive. Because if the change is very peaceful, I don't think anyone will want to give up interests that have cost so much. That's the way the world is. No matter how much religion there may be, you leave the church and you forget everything.”

IVAN: “I think the Eucharist is to hasten that change.”

FELIPE: “And the hastening depends on the people, the people do it.”

WILLIAM: “Besides, the so-called interests are more costly to those who produce them than to the ones who call themselves owners.”

CARLOS MEJIA GODOY: “With regard to what he was saying, that people forget, or that we forget: we're talking about a permanent communion and not about a church ritual. It's the continuous, daily communion everywhere, in the factory, in the office, wherever one may be earning a living. That's the true communion that's going to produce the change.”

I: “All the products of the earth and of human work have to come from everybody for us to have a new society and for us to drink that new wine.”

OLIVIA: “Referring to what he was saying about the ones who don't want to give up what has cost them so much: in fact, what they have hasn't cost them, it has cost the poor; and the ones it has cost are the ones it should be divided among. Because if I'm rich, all I do is give orders, exploit!”

The bank manager: “Well, I wasn't referring to what is dishonestly acquired but to what is honestly acquired.”

OLIVIA: “But almost nobody has anything honestly acquired.”

The manager: “People often take advantage of power to get enormous lands. They cost them almost nothing.”

OLIVIA: “Notice that the ones that work hardest are the laborers and the farm hands, the peasants, because they're the working class and we're the ones that don't have a place to sleep. The peasants go to work for the rich from sunrise to sunset and they don't even have a change of clothes, and the ones that are sitting at home are wearing good clothes, eating good food, with good cars and good homes. So it's us oppressed who've got to worry about that kingdom, so the sharing will come now. And those who are sitting down think they're working but they're only giving orders, exploiting those out in the field under the sun broiling, broiling; or in the factory. So it's us poor people who've got to worry about getting free all together.”

Alejandro's friend ALICIA, who works in a Managua office: “I think we ourselves have to start, we who are oppressed, because it's no use if four of us start to struggle and all the rest are asleep; if we're going to do anything, let's all get together, because we're talking about communion. It's a unity of everybody, and this new alliance has to be mainly laborers and farmhands.”

“What Jesus says there about wine is like the announcement of a final feast where we'll enjoy happiness, love, everything.”

I: “Christ won't drink the new wine with us until there is communion among everybody, until there is perfect communism, *Koinonia.”*

OSCAR: “Man, that calls for a lot of faith.”

I: “Why?”

OSCAR: “Why, if you say, all right, eat me here, this is my body, how am I going to eat you if you're alive! If you offer me a hunk of bread there, I need a lot of faith. Really, because I believe in you. If I take it, it's because I believe in you. There you have to prove if you have faith. It's fine to say: Eat of this. This is my body. So it was a loaf of bread. And afterwards he offers them wine: This is my blood.”

OLIVIA: “The fact is that the disciples had faith in him, right? And I believe every Christian has to have that same faith, and see that all nature is a communion with God because all things are made by God. If we're going to eat a banana, there is the love of God represented in that banana. And with much more reason if he gives it to us with his own hands.”

OSCAR: “Man, I think all of us here ought to say what we feel. I felt at that moment when I heard the words of Christ: Take, for this is my body. ‘Crap, how am I going to eat him in that hunk of bread?’ I don't think he got

mad at me. He must have noticed that I understood him, that I'm no fool. If I have faith in him, I have to fill myself with him like that, to gradually get myself equal to him and to gradually have a tremendous love for humanity."

MARIITA: "He also said we'd see him in our neighbor, especially in the poor, in the people. He said, 'The poor are me.' And for that too you need a great faith. There are people that say God is like this or like that. But they can't see him in their neighbor. Those are the people that some of you were talking about who believe that Christ is in the host that they eat and they don't believe in the Christ that's us."

97.

Supper Talk I

(John 13:31–35)

This time the composer Carlos Mejia Godoy was with us. And a large group came again to the Mass from San Carlos when they heard that he was here.

After Judas left, Jesus said: "Now is revealed the glory of the Son of Man, and the glory of God is revealed in him."

I: "Judas had just stood up, and the Passion is going to begin. Jesus is on the eve of his death, and he knows it."

ALEJANDRO: "But where did Judas go to? This Judas is the one that went out to do the betraying?"

I said he was. ALEJANDRO went on: "It seems to me that when there's betrayal and persecution of a group it's because it's doing something, right? When people begin to attack an action, and to betray it, it's because it's producing results, it's beginning to show its value, this work, beginning to be glorious. But I don't think my commentary is good enough."

CHEPE: "I think he's telling them they can be frank now because the Judas, the spy, is gone."

I: "But it's curious that he says that now his glory begins to be revealed, and the glory will be his death."

CARLOS MEJIA GODOY: "As I see it, the ones who were persecuting him, and had forced Judas to betray him, thought that when they killed him it would be all over. And he was conscious that it would not be all over. And that was the glory that they were going to see: that he went on living. Because he is living in the people is why the people are gathered here."

DONALD: “Now his glory is revealed, he says, at the hour when his death is approaching, and in fact those were going to be the most important moments of his life, because they were going to be his delivering himself up to the world. With this he was going to show his love.”

ELVIS: “That's the glory of all those who deliver themselves up to others and die for their people. It's also the glory of the guerrilla fighter.”

And if the Son of Man reveals the glory of God, then God will reveal his glory, and he will do it soon.

MANUEL: “Gosh! The glory of God is love, and Christ is showing his love for the world by dying on the Cross. It's the triumph of love, also.”

I, adding to Manuel: “God is love, and Christ will show that love with his death, and that love raises him up.”

DONALD: “As I see it, when a people, for example, Nicaragua or any other oppressed people, emerges from oppression and frees itself, then the glory of God will be revealed. And it's something that will be revealed more and more each day in Latin America, the glory of God, the freedom of people, when there is no more oppression, no class distinctions.”

FERNANDO, my Jesuit brother: “We know that God is love and social justice, and the glory of God, as you say, is when love and justice triumph on earth. And Christ, on going to his death, is conscious that he is going to his glory, because with it begins the freedom of people.”

My children, I shall not be with you for long. You are going to look for me, but just as I told the Jews so I tell you now: You will not be able to go where I am going.

OSCAR: “He knew that humanity still wasn't going to be united, there was still going to be a lot of exploitation. And as long as there's injustices, inequalities, Jesus isn't with his disciples because they're divided. He surely knew that some day there'd be a society without exploitation or injustice, and that then he was going to be with us again.”

MARIA: “They didn't have his love, and therefore they couldn't follow him. The enemies couldn't follow him there any more to kill him, and the disciples couldn't follow him either to his glory. Afterwards they would be able to follow him, but for the moment he goes by himself.”

ALEJANDRO: “That's a bit contradictory, isn't it, that he was dead and they were looking for him? Would they be looking for his ideas? No, because they knew the ideas very well. What sense was there in looking for somebody who was already dead? I think he says they're going to be divided, without his presence, which is union.”

“He's going to God and we can't follow him there. Could he also be saying there's no heaven, that we have to seek salvation just here on earth?”

I: “I don't think so, because a little later he says that in the same place where he is his disciples are also going to be. There's plenty of room there for all of us, and if this weren't true he would have told us. We know that the kingdom of heaven isn't in the sky, but Jesus also tells us that he has come to free us from death, and that's why he speaks of glory when he speaks of his death, of the revelation of the glory of God in his death. In the Old Testament the ‘glory of God’ is the same as the ‘liberating victory of God,’ and so when Jesus here speaks of his death, he's talking about a liberation of God.”

ELVIS: “It seems to me that he's telling them that personally they're not going to find him, but that the earth will be liberated from all its injustices, and that we will bring about that liberation, and love will be established, and then indeed we shall have him again.”

I: “That's very good, and let's see the words that Jesus says to his disciples just after he has told them that they couldn't follow him.”

I give you this new commandment: that you shall love one another.

DONALD: “Well, he means that we'll find him there.”

My brother FERNANDO: “We can't go where he goes, but we can find him that way, by loving one another; in this way he will indeed be present. He is saying goodbye to them, and on giving them that new commandment he is telling them, telling us, that we must look for him not where he is going but in communal love. ‘Look for me where you are going to find me: love one another.’ Because there's a danger in wanting to look for him in the sky, and he's saying to them: ‘You are going to look for me, and I give you this new commandment.’”

ELVIS: “As long as we have a divided society, as long as there are class distinctions, he's not there. And they're going to be looking for him without

finding him. But if we obey the new commandment, then we've got him with us.”

I asked why he calls it a new commandment.

“Because it didn't exist before.”

I said that it certainly existed in the Bible: “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” And that commandment summed up all the Law, according to Christ.

LAUREANO: “I think it was just in theory and wasn't practiced. Now it's a new commandment because it's supposed to be practiced and to change society. It's a commandment that will bring a revolution, and that's the newness.”

I: “It's true, with that precept society hadn't been transformed, slavery hadn't been abolished, injustices and cruelties had continued. This will be something different, not just a religious precept as the Jews saw it but a new social reality. On calling it ‘a new commandment,’ Jesus is saying that his commandment is a new command to love.”

FELIPE: “Ernesto, it seems to me that he's telling us to forget all the old things of the ancient religion and all the commandments that were in the Bible. That there ought to be only one religion, the religion of love.”

OLIVIA: “I think that when Jesus gave that new message of love there was a lack of love just as there's a lack now at present. In the Scriptures God appeared as love, and those Scriptures have existed all our lives; everybody reads them and nobody has followed them. It seems to me that he came to bring that commandment of love and justice and equality for the second time. Because I think that since the Creation God has been love, and because God loved us God put on earth the community of humanity, but people have always destroyed that love through selfishness, through self-interest, money, and all that; they've destroyed that love. That's why Christ came to die, and to give us again that new commandment, to see if people can now really bring about that love.”

I: “There were changes in society and revolutions from then on and that's why that commandment of love that Jesus brought was new, even though love is as old as the creation of the world, as Olivia says. That's just what Saint John says in his first Epistle: that's the ancient commandment that we've had from the beginning, but it's like new ‘because the darkness is passing and the true light is now shining.’”

ALEJANDRO: “And those words ‘Love one another,’ doesn't that mean that if you love you must demand that the others love you, you must demand love?”

I: “And that may also be the newness, what Alejandro points out. Because the commandment in the Bible was only to love your neighbor. And the saints, they've always been doing that throughout history. But now the commandment is of a new social order; you're going to love the others and you're going to be loved by the others, and everybody's going to love everybody. Isn't that what you mean, Alejandro?”

He answered: “Yes. It's not just to say: ‘Love the others.’ It's that ‘Love each other’ means ‘Love and ask for love.’ The other precept is conformist.”

Just as I love you, you must love one another.

I: “He speaks again of ‘one another,’ which means that love is mutual, or rather that it belongs to everyone, and he doesn't tell us that just as he loves us we must love but that just as he loves us we must have mutual love. God's love of us, that's the love that exists among us.”

YOUNG MYRIAM: “They all have to be equal. That's the new society that he's planning.”

MARIO AVILA, a Salvadoran composer: “It's a new love with which people were going to love one another, the love that Christ brought and with which he loved humankind. And that's why he says it's a new commandment, to love one another as he loves us. He is the union between us, the mutual love that there will be among us, the collective love that there's going to be in the society of the future, that's the love that he has for us.”

FERNANDO: “We shall all love with Christ's love, and we shall all be loved by others with Christ's love: a love that leads one even to give his life for others.”

ELVIS: “And those who have already died for others in the struggle for freedom, those have already loved others with Christ's love.”

If you love one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples.

FELIPE: “Wherever a group is organized that loves one another like that, a society, it's clear that those people are disciples of Jesus. And where there isn't a society organized with that mutual love, there are no disciples.”

FERNANDO: “There you'd have the situation we talked about earlier: they'd look for him but they wouldn't find him. They'd be separated from Jesus.”

I: “But would it be important to Jesus that everyone would notice that they are his disciples?”

LAUREANO: “It would seem like boasting.”

FELIPE: “It seems that people can understand, through the deeds of this community, that we have learned from him, that we are doing what he taught (he taught not only with words but also with his example, and above all by dying). And we have learned from him as the disciple has learned from the teacher, that is, we are acting like him. Like a master carpenter, like Jose Arana who knows how to make a good boat, and he has an assistant; and when we see that the assistant can also now make a good boat, we see that he learned from his teacher.”

LAUREANO: “It seems he said that as a guarantee that it was going to be true. Because it could be that somebody goes around saying they love their neighbor and probably it's just to screw their neighbor. But if you practice love you're not talking nonsense; you're talking about a reality.”

I: “You have to keep in mind who Jesus Christ is in order to understand what it means to be his disciple.”

FELIPE: “He's the liberator; and then it'll be known that we are the followers of the liberator, that we too are liberators.”

I: “We must also remember that he is the incarnate Word of God, according to the prologue of this same Gospel of Saint John.”

LAUREANO: “It's because through Jesus God expressed the love he had for humanity; it was then the word of God.”

I: “And when God expresses this love to us God's also telling us, by means of the divine word, Jesus, that we must love one another. The word of God is the word of love, because God is love. God's word is the commandment of love. Christ is that word, which has come to communicate to us the love for one another. He incarnates the commandment that we must love one another. And to love one another means to put in practice his word, to be his disciples.”

MANUEL: “It's damned tough to love when some jerk is maybe hating me, or is talking about me, and I've got to be loving him.”

FERNANDO: “Well, that other guy is also receiving the same commandment. It's not just for you; it's for the other guy too. When

everybody obeys that commandment, then we're going to know, says Christ, that we're disciples of the one who has brought the teaching of love. That's going to be his glory, our love, and the glory of God revealed in him."

MARIO: "When there's no injustice, no slavery, that's when we'll see his glory and God's glory: the glory of love."

I asked if there was anything more to add. They said there wasn't. They asked Mejia Godoy and Mario Avila to sing their songs.

98.

Supper Talk II

(John 14:1–14)

We continue at supper.

> *Do not be so worried. Have faith in God and have faith in me also. In my Father's house there are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. So I go to prepare a place for you.*

GLORIA: “Heaven is a united humanity.”

MANUEL: “Is that the just society that's going to be?”

FELIPE: “This seems to me a little involved, all those places. It sounds like the afterlife, doesn't it?”

OLIVIA: “Yes, because he says he's going to prepare a place for them yonder, now that he's going to die; and that if there isn't anything there he'd have said frankly that there isn't anything.”

WILLIAM: “I think this is involved too; I'm a little confused like Felipe. Because we had understood that the kingdom was going to be created in this life; and the Father's house, it seems to me, has to be human society.”

I: “It seems clear to me that Jesus is talking here of a humanity after death. Or at least we'll be included in that just society, if we are in it, even after death. We're not being confused. Where he is going is to his resurrection. He's saying this very clearly.”

ALEJANDRO: “He says we're going to live together in a house. The Father's house is a family house. Humanity is going to gather in a single family.”

I: “Humanity will be united in a common soul. That is the Father's house. He says the house is very large, because it's for all of humanity, all races, all civilizations, and all the ages. And perhaps also all the planets in the universe. Perhaps the Father's house is the whole universe, and that's why Jesus says there are many mansions, or living places, or apartments. And as Jesus always had a very revolutionary attitude with respect to traditional religion, he tells them that if it weren't necessary to think of another life, in a survival after death, he would have been the first one to tell us. And he tells the disciples that they now know which is the place and which is the way.”

> *Thomas said: “Lord, we don't know where you are going. How are we going to know the way?” Jesus answered him: “I am the way, the truth, and the life.”*

I: “Three very different things that don't seem to have anything in common.”

OSCAR: “It seems that we were lost and he came to show us the way. The way is his message, love, to arrive at the Father's house.”

REBECA, his mother: “And he also came to show what the truth is. The truth is the opposite of deception, of exploitation. So the truth is love.”

MARCELINO, Rebeca's husband and the stepfather of Oscar: “And life is the same thing as love, because love produces life, while injustice produces death, crime.”

WILLIAM: “That can be proven statistically: among the poor there is a lower life expectancy than among the rich, and among poor countries lower than among rich countries. That's taking life from the poor.”

I: “And in the Bible truth and justice (or liberation) appear as the same thing. Saint Paul speaks of those who oppress *truth* with *injustice.”*

OSCAR: “It seems as though they were confused, too, as though they didn't understand; but it seems that if we understand love, then we've already begun to be in a community, in the Lord's house. It's not necessary to be all together as we're together here, because there are many places to be together as we are here talking about what interests us, which is love.”

> *If you knew me you would also know my Father; and you really do know him and you have seen him*.

OLIVIA: “To know Jesus is to know the people. If you know his revolutionary message, you know the Father; if not, no matter how religious you are, you don't know God.”

FELIPE: “He's telling them to unite and that this love is God; that they already know him because they know his teaching of love and God is love.”

Philip said to him: “Lord, show us the Father, that is all we want.” Jesus answered him: “Philip, I have been with you all so long, and you still do not know me? He who sees me sees the Father.”

I: “Philip was confused. And no wonder. It seems that Jesus is talking at the same time about two opposite things about the Father's house: one is in the afterlife, and the other is that seeing him is seeing the Father, in this life.”

“But we can't see Christ as his disciples saw him. How can we see God?”

IVAN: “We see Christ here. In others. And anyone who sees him like that sees the Father.”

ELVIS: “You might say that in the poor you see the Father.”

I: “Saint John says that no one has seen God, but he doesn't say it in the sense that no one has seen God in this life and that God can be seen only in the other life, but in the sense that no one has seen God because God can't be seen, because God doesn't exist as people imagine. God does exist, but in another way. Saint John adds right after: ‘but if we love one another God exists in us.’”

The Father, who lives in me, is he who does his own work.

I: “He often speaks about doing his Father's work. He gives as an example a workman's son who learns his father's trade, as the carpenter Jose Arand learned carpentry from his father Angel. We may ask ourselves what was that trade that Jesus learned.”

ALEJANDRO: “His Father's trade is construction.”

I: “Yes, the same trade as that of his other father, Joseph. The Gospel doesn't exactly say that Joseph was a carpenter. It uses the Greek word *tecnos* (from which the word ‘technician’ comes). *Tecnos* means maker, constructor, worker in general (at that time there was no specialized labor). The work of his Father was also that same work of *tecnos* of the universe.

Here he tells us that the Father that lives in him is the one who is carrying out his own work. In another passage he had told us that God had not rested since the six days of the creation, as the Bible says, but that he kept on working always."

LAUREANO: "If God is love, love is always working to get people to love each other."

I: "God created the universe, and created it through love, or through evolution, which is the same thing; by means of the cohesive force that unites atoms, molecules, cells, animals, people, and societies. The Father has never stopped working because the universe has always gone on creating itself, through evolution. But with his Son now the work is different; we're coming into a new stage of evolution. Evolution now begins to be conscious and directed by people."

FELIPE: "His work is to teach love. That love that he brought is God who is acting in him, doing his work. The work is the liberation of humanity."

OSCAR: "Ernesto, I think the Father works through his Son, and Christ does that work through each person, through each one of us. For me, that's the fight for liberation, as Felipe says, and if we fight we can win, and that will be the resurrection, or better the transformation of life, because we'll have defeated everything that is now oppressing the unfortunate. Many have died in that struggle and it's because Christ was working in those people."

DONALD: "The teaching that Jesus brought, that he is the poor man and that anyone who sees the poor sees God: that is the work of God. And Christ was leaving the world because that work was going to stay on earth so that we could continue it. Wherever anybody works for humankind, for a more just society, wherever anybody works for the Revolution, there the work of the Father is being done. Creation is being continued. The world is being made better than he left it to us so we could improve it."

Believe me that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me; or if not, at least believe me for what I do.

DONALD: "That if they don't believe in him, that he is united to God, let them believe in what he does. What he does is unite people, and bring justice to the earth. Let them believe in the revolution. That's enough."

FELIPE: "Well, that's believing in him."

Truly I tell you, he who believes in me, he also will do the things that I do, and things even greater, for I go to where the Father is.

BOSCO: “Perhaps it's the perfect society.”

ALEJANDRO: “The work that he does is the same as the Father does: the revolution. And we'll make that greater than what Jesus could have made it.”

WILLIAM: “He says it's because he's going to the Father; that's why we could do things greater than he. Because he was only coming to start the liberation, and we should continue it, and the liberation will gradually get greater and greater.”

DON TOMAS: “Suppose that we're left alone here, without Ernesto, and suppose we manage to establish justice that we didn't manage to do when he was here. And things they just talk about doing now, then they put them in practice. That's the way it seems to me.”

OLIVIA: “When in a country where people that didn't used to eat are eating, and people that didn't used to have medicines now have them, as is the case in Cuba, that's where love is being built up, and the work of the Son is being done, which he learned from his Father; but it's being done through people, because it's not going to come from the sky.”

And all that you ask in my name, I will do it, so that the Son may reveal the glory of the Father.

NATALIA: “You have to change your attitude.”

OLIVIA: “To ask in his name isn't to say prayers mentioning his name, like so many who pray and are rich and exploiters. Specifically, here in Nicaragua I think that to ask in his name is not to pray but to act.”

NATALIA: “You have to change your attitude. Because if you don't change your attitude, no matter how much you pray, you don't accomplish anything.”

OLIVIA: “It's changing ourselves to change society, and changing society to change ourselves. And I think those people who are changing society in other places, doing marvels for the people, are doing it in the name of Christ though they may be atheists. God doesn't mean anything to them, Christ doesn't mean a thing to them, but the people mean a lot to them, and so what they do they do in the name of Christ and in the name of God,

because Christ and the Father are one, and so are Christ and the poor. And that's the glory of the Father, to have love happen on earth."

I: "That's very true, what Olivia says. In the Bible there's a lot of talk about the 'glory of God,' but Christians no longer know what that means. 'Glory of God' is the same as 'justice.' It's the fulfillment of justice on earth and the elimination of the unjust. In other words: it's the kingdom of God. When the people were liberated in Egypt, they were shown the 'glory of God' in a cloud; and each time there was a new liberation, it was a new manifestation of the glory of God. In the Psalms, the oppressed and the poor often ask God for their liberation; it was a new manifestation of the glory of God. In the Psalms, the oppressed and the poor often ask God for their liberation, telling him to show his 'glory.' The Prophets say that the peoples will see the *justice* and the *glory* of God (as if they were the same thing). The glory of God is also identified with peace just as justice is identified with peace. And when Christ is born, there is that song of the angels: 'glory to God' and 'peace to humankind' (as if they were the same thing). And that is the glory of the Father that Jesus says he will reveal when we ask in his name."

MANUEL: "He says 'all that you ask in my name'; so we have to pray too."

OLIVIA: "But he says let it be 'in his name'; and 'in his name' is loving your neighbor, 'in his name' is freeing the people from oppression, and that's what they're doing, the people that are changing society in those atheist countries; and that prayer produces miracles, like the miracles that we're seeing there."

MANUEL from San Carlos: "The hunger strikes and the protests that are being held in the Managua churches are a better prayer than what they used to have in those churches. That's asking in the name of Jesus Christ for a quart of milk not to cost more than a peso. Because that's too much for it to cost."

OSCAR: "We must act in the name of the leader of a group, as soon as he has gone. It's just the same. We've got a Che Guevara and so many others who've died for justice, for the kingdom of God, and we must fight in their name, in the name of what they did, which is the same as Christ did, and even greater, even better, because maybe Christ didn't get to do that."

I: "Before, he said that the Father acts in him. Now he says he acts in the disciples, who will be able to do greater things than he can."

OSCAR: “It seems to me that if a person fights for that same thing and then goes away, and we go on acting in the name of what that person's done and taught, it seems to me we're acting in the name of Christ, and we're doing the same thing he did, which was the Father's work.”

I: “Continuing the Father's work, which is the fulfilling of love on earth.”

OSCAR: “I used to think that the name was worthless, doing something ‘in the name of Christ,’ and now I see what it means. It seems that if you fight for the freedom of a group, and then you go away, and others carry on your fight, they're doing it in your name. Why, man, going back to what Tomas says: if you've been fighting for something and you've taught us and you go away and we're going to fight in your name, it's the same thing; any of us who are here, we're going to accomplish something that Christ didn't accomplish, but it's being accomplished now through us.”

I: “He is the way to arrive at the Father's house, at the house of the unity of all people, where all humanity will live together and never die. That's why he said from the beginning: don't worry, have faith.”

OSCAR: “It seems that the body will die, but human beings won't die, and the body doesn't matter.”

I: “The individual dies but we go on living, and it's not that we go on living without a body but with a body in common, which is the body of Christ, all of humanity, unified. Since the individual body dies, he speaks of taking us to the Father's house, which means a collective life, after the individual death. If at the end death should triumph over life, reaction would have triumphed over the revolution. Anything more?”

99.

Supper Talk III

(John 14:15–31)

If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will beg the Father to send you another defender, to be with you always: the spirit of truth.

I: “We are still at the Last Supper. Jesus says that if we love him we must obey his commandments. We know that they are only one, the new commandment. But why would he say that if we love him we have to love one another?”

FELIPE: “It seems that he and we are the same thing.”

I: “Yes, he is love incarnate, he himself is the new commandment; to love his message of love is to love one another.”

“You can also say the reverse: to love people is to love him.”

“But to love people is to love the oppressed; it's not to love the exploiters.”

OLIVIA: “It seems quite mysterious that he's going to beg the Father to send another. But the other is his own illumination, because love has really been seen very little; it wasn't evident in those times. And so it was as if he were saying: ‘I'm going to send you love, which is what there's none of in the world, unity.’ That is, himself, because who else was he going to send except himself, in spirit.”

I: “He and the Father are the same thing; the Father, who is love, sent us Jesus, love incarnate, and now he's going to send us the spirit of love, that is, the spirit of the teachings of Jesus, which is also himself.”

OSCAR: “It seems as though love existed before, right? But the Father saw that love, without the help of the Holy Spirit, could die, and that it was

necessary to send that other one to illumine and give strength to each person, so they'll feel love. And that's why he sent the Spirit. But we Christians must always be careful to ask the Spirit to illumine us or something like that, because if we don't we're left as we used to be before. Because love, it seems, is not a matter of just feeling love, because lots of us say 'I'm in love,' and maybe we're screwing our neighbors."

I: "But it's curious: he doesn't call him the Spirit of love but the Spirit of truth."

OSCAR: "Hell! It's like if I tell a woman I love her and I don't love her. I'm not telling her the truth. There it's not the Spirit of love talking but a completely false love."

FELIPE: "Because Christians often have a love that's just talk, and those who aren't Christians are the ones that make love a reality; they are acting the truth; because even though they don't talk about love or Christianity or theories of that sort, they're really the ones that are following the truth, practicing the truth."

OSCAR: "Of course, they speak with love."

FELIPE: "They speak with love but they don't talk about love."

I: "In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit is the spirit of Yahweh, which is the same as saying the spirit of justice and liberation. He's the one who spoke through the prophets proclaiming the truth."

RAUL: "That's the spirit that's offered to us if we love each other. If we don't love each other…. "

> *Those who are worldly cannot receive him, because they do not see him or know him; but you know him, because he is with you and he will always remain with you.*

"The spirit of God or the spirit of justice is the spirit of struggle that is present in the people. It's class consciousness. It's also the spirit of Jesus Christ. And the worldly ones, that is, the oppressors, don't see him or know him."

"If it's the spirit of truth it's the spirit of justice. Because exploitation and deception are the same thing."

GUSTAVO, the Colombian: "I think that truth, the whole truth, is always revolutionary. Then the spirit of truth is something that moves things to

change, to cast down the oppressor's lie, to impose the truth of the oppressed."

I: "When Christ came to the world it was full of falsehoods, myths, deceptions, because it was full of injustice. The Gospel of Saint John somewhere else identifies truth with love."

GUSTAVO: "The stuff in this Gospel seems to me very inspiring; for it gives the assurance that when the physical presence of Christ is not in the midst of his followers, that is, the oppressed, they are always left with the truth, which is on their side."

RAUL: "It seems to me that when Christ says he's going to send someone else, we may think he was referring to Marx."

GUSTAVO: "I believe that in every epoch humanity has had its liberations, and it has got closer and closer to a kingdom of love. It's the spirit of truth that has always guided people in that search for definitive liberation."

RAUL: "And it has acted in Marx, right? I'm not saying he's physically the Holy Spirit. But here he says very clearly: 'Those who are worldly cannot receive him.' It's perfectly clear. The bourgeois are never going to receive Marx."

I: "In the Gospel of Saint John 'the world' is the same as the system, unjust society, the status quo. Those who belong to the system, says Christ, cannot receive that spirit."

> *On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am with you*.

TOMAS: "We are all together."

FELIPE: "The Father is love, and Jesus is the love that has come to us, so that we can love each other and be united in love."

> *He who knows and obeys my commandments shows that he really loves me. And my Father will love the one who loves me, and I too will love him and will reveal myself to him*.

FELIPE: "The one that loves is the one that practices the truth, the one that commits no injustice. And God is truth; love is truth."

OSCAR: "Well, what happens is that many of us, most people in the world, know the truth but we don't practice it, obey it. So I think that's why there are wars between lies and truth."

“There're people who know the truth but they don't obey it out of fear. They obey the lie, they obey the government. If we obey Christ we have to disobey the commandments of these authorities.”

Judas (not the Iscariot) said to him: “Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus answered: “He who loves me heeds what I say; and my Father will love him and my Father and I will come to live with him. He who does not love me, does not heed what I say.”

ELVIS: “The worldly ones of that time were rejecting him, and then he wasn't revealing himself to those people; he doesn't go on talking with them. He's revealing himself to the oppressed people; he reveals himself to the people who, in the long run, will understand him.”

BOSCO: “That's what happens now with revolutionaries. Revolutionaries aren't going to reveal themselves to the world, to the government, to the police; they're going to reveal themselves to the oppressed, those who are interested in making things change.”

I: “We may say that the revolution is not revealed to those who are exploiting; they can not discover the revolution. According to the answer that Jesus gives, those who don't follow his commands (to love) will not be able to understand him.”

FELIPE: “Ernesto, I also believe the worldly ones aren't going to understand him, aren't going to try to understand him in the first place because they have no needs, because they've got everything. The message is for the others, for them to realize that they are oppressed by a class and find out for themselves how to liberate themselves.”

GUSTAVO: “He's making a class distinction. The ones who are with the world, with the system, he won't reveal himself to them.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me he said that phrase because he knows the harshness that money brings, how hard it is to get loose of riches in order to love, and then he was assuring us that it was the oppressed class that's going to understand him. But there are also people that never accept a revolution and don't understand it even though they are without money.”

The Holy Spirit, the defender, that my Father will send you in my name, will teach it all to you, and will make you remember all I have

said to you.

ELVIS: “They'll be leaders who will come from the people.”

IVAN: “Che, for example, came to help us to remember.”

I: “All the revolutionary inspiration that there's been in the world is this spirit, and he's reminding us of what Jesus has said, what's in this book that we're commenting on and that has often been forgotten. Jesus knew that what he said was going to be forgotten, and that it was going to be necessary for the revolutionary spirit to come to remind us of it.”

I leave you peace, I give you my peace. I do not give what the world gives.

I: “The Jews used to greet one another with the word ‘shalom’ (peace), and Jesus here is saying farewell. But the word ‘shalom,’ which appears very frequently in the Bible, means much more than our word ‘peace.’ ‘Shalom’ is not only the absence of war; it's also harmony and happiness. It's to enjoy peace in the abundance of material goods, and in harmony with neighbors. It gives the idea of song and dance, and it's above all the happiness of a people free of all oppression. This peace isn't the opposite of war, because during war there can also be ‘shalom’ in a people that is united; the opposite of it is rather social injustice or oppression. It had been announced that the Messiah would bring a permanent peace. When Jesus was born the empire was at peace in the so-called Pax Romana, but he says his peace is not the peace of the world.”

BOSCO: “The peace of the United States.”

“Or the peace of Nicaragua; the peace they say we've had for forty years.”

FELIPE: “That's a false peace, the peace of oppression. We can be really at peace only when we have all our goods in common; otherwise we're divided into classes and we're fighting.”

I: “Among the Jews ‘shalom’ was the harmony of the united community, and it was something similar to the words ‘communion’ and ‘communism.’ In an early age people had been at peace among themselves and at peace with all of nature. The Messiah would establish a new reign of peace: all peoples would be at peace; even the animals would be at peace among

themselves; cosmic harmony would be established; and humanity would become again at peace with God.”

You have heard me say that I am leaving, and that I shall come to be with you again. If you really loved me, you would have been glad to know that I am going to my Father; because he is greater than I.

ALEJANDRO: “This has a lot of application for us, to encourage us to a more serious commitment. Because you're always afraid, mainly afraid to die, but you think you're going to end, that death is everything. This is very important as much for your family as for you.”

“Yes, you mustn't be afraid of death, for there's resurrection. He goes away and returns. But where is he going? To heaven? What's heaven?”

I: “In the Bible, ‘heaven’ is not a place outside the world, as it was later understood. God was the creator of heaven as well as of the earth, and God was in heaven as well as on the earth. It was said that heaven was the throne of God and the earth the platform at his feet. There's a passage where Christ says that the earth is as sacred as heaven. (‘Do not swear by heaven, because it is the throne of God, nor by the earth, which is the platform at his feet.’) And Jesus here doesn't say that he's going to heaven but that he's going to the Father. And he also says he'll be coming back from there.”

ELVIS: “It's like many revolutionaries who have died for the revolution but they're alive in the people.”

I: “Alive in the people, but with a real life. To be resurrected doesn't mean that you're on a poster.”

I will not talk much longer with you, because the prince of this world is coming, although he has no power over me.

ELVIS: “He's referring to the kings there were at that time and that were nothing but falsehood and lies; and that's just what Satan is: lies, deceit, injustice. He's referring to all that.”

I: “It's true. Satan means simply the adversary. And Jesus is identifying him with the political power of that society, with the system. He doesn't say that the devil is the prince of the cosmos but of slave society. Soon afterwards he will say before Pilate that his kingdom is not of ‘this world.’”

FELIPE: “And he's saying that he's going to be killed by the prince of this system. It's a very revolutionary way of talking about the system, saying

that Satan is its governor. Like saying now that he's the president."

"It's good to get this clear, because people have very extravagent ideas about the devil, common people, that is. A little while ago, on the San Juan River, a lady was talking to me about the devil. In Managua, she says to me, there's an office that the devil has, and it's visited by the ones that have a pact with the devil. I asked her: 'And do you know which office it is?' 'No,' she said, 'because only those who have a pact with the devil know that.' 'Could it be one that's up on a hill?' I asked. 'No, what a thing to say; that's where the president lives!' she answered."

LAUREANO: "It's a miracle that lady didn't report you."

"We're afraid the devil will jump out at us, and we don't realize that we have him right here. He's not out on the highways jumping out at people, he's running the country. And if I exploit my sister or brother, well, I'm a devil among you. And it's very hard to make *campesinos* who are being exploited understand this. We don't realize that we're sick, and that our children don't have enough to eat, and they don't have any capacity for love, don't have schools. Imagine having no schools, no schools in Solentiname! And so many children without schools is a sin, because there's enough money in capitalism. And so much exploitation. And we have no schools for the children; that's the worst thing the devil has done."

"I don't think there's anyone here who doesn't understand that we're exploited; the trouble is that nobody knows the solution for this."

"There's a solution in this book; but you have to begin by knowing that the devil is not a ghost, but a reality, and that he governs us."

"The fact is that exploitation ranges from the biggest to the littlest. If it were only the president, the government, it wouldn't be too bad; but it ranges from one to another, and another, and another."

I: "Until it reaches the most downtrodden people who don't exploit anybody; instead, they get exploited by everybody."

OSCAR: "The exploiters are the ones that are obeying the king of the world."

> *Thus it has to be so that the world will know that I love the Father and that I do what he commanded me. Rise up. Let us go away from here.*

OLIVIA: "By bringing that message he was obeying love."

FELIPE: “The only way to show that you love is to free yourself from your own life. That way you can change the world, the system.”

OSCAR: “As I see it, when he told them there, ‘Rise up and let's go away from here,’ I find, you know, that he wants to give them the message: let's not be sleeping, let's not be letting the guys in charge be in charge of us. That's why he says: ‘Rise up and let's go away from here.’ If we have the power to change reality, let's not stick around here just talking.”

100.

Supper Talk IV

(John 15:1–13)

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. If one of my branches bears no fruit, he cuts it off.

FELIPE: “I see that most of us call ourselves Christians or Catholics or Evangelicals, but there are many who are separated from the Gospels, from the true plant. Those are the branches that are going to be cut off, the ones that don't come together as Christ wishes.”

OSCAR: “Those are the ones that, according to the Gospel, are cut off. They must be cut off immediately. Any exploiter of human beings will have to be eliminated from society.”

I: “But what attracts my attention is that Jesus says they are branches of him. Notice that he says there are branches of him that don't bear fruit.”

FELIX: “But everyone who's on earth is a branch of him, don't you see? When you don't have mercy on others, when you don't love your neighbor, then you're a branch that bears no fruit. The loveless ones will be eliminated from the face of the earth.”

I: “So we see two things: that we are branches of Jesus Christ; and that there are branches that are bad that will have to be cut off.”

And he prunes the branches that bear fruit, so that they bear more fruit.

FELIPE: “That's good.”

I: “Why is it good?”

FELIPE: “He means that those who love, he'll make them have more love.”

MARCELINO: “Maybe they weren't rotten branches but green branches that needed pruning.”

“The pruning must be the suffering that falls to our lot.”

“Sacrifice in the revolution, then.”

“That pruning is also when the revolutionaries are removed. When they kill them, many more are reborn. They used to produce good fruit, but with their deaths they produce much more.”

I: “There can be no revolution without grief. And it seems to me that Jesus is saying there are two kinds of suffering in humanity: the cutting off of those who are useless, and the pruning of those who produce so that they will produce more.”

“In every socialist system there is also the cutting off of bad branches, and the pruning of the good ones.”

> *Remain united to me, as I remain united to you. A branch cannot produce fruit by itself, if it does not remain united to the plant; in the same way you cannot produce fruit if you do not remain united to me*.

“To be united to Christ is to be united to others. To be united to your community. By means of a small community you're united to a larger community, as the small branches are united with other bigger ones. And all the branches together are Christ.”

“The branches don't bear fruit unless they're united to the whole plant, but the plant without the branches doesn't yield anything. Grapes come from the branches, right?”

“I think that pruning the bad branches, that ought to be done by people themselves, through society's justice. Here it says that the Father is the one that does it, but it seems to me that he does it through people.”

“You have to be united because if you stay by yourself you're kicked off the plant.”

“Solitude is selfishness.”

“The only way to bear fruit is through love; that's why he says we can't do anything without him. And what we're going to bear is just that: love.”

“He's saying he is everybody and that we'll be united with him by being united with everybody.”

I am the vine, and you are the branches. He who remains united with me, and I with him, bears much fruit.

“And what will the fruit be?”

“Wine.”

I: “And wine in the Scripture is always a symbol of happiness and love. So it is the plant of love. And the pruning of grief is so that humanity may produce more love.”

“There's going to be a lot of wine, but in order to have a lot of wine a lot of branches will have to be destroyed. He says this a little before his death, and he must have his death on his mind, and the deaths of so many martyrs, his followers.”

“It's also very fair that one part of humanity is going to be cut off; so that there'll be no injustice in humanity, and no criminals. People who aren't in favor of unity, those are the ones torn off the plant.”

If you remain united to me, and do not forget my teachings, ask what you wish, and it will be given to you.

“Gosh! I think when we're all united (and that's being united with Christ, because he is the plant, the people), there's no need to ask for anything.”

OSCAR: “His teaching, which he tells us not to forget, is that we must all be equal and not have one greater than others. Then we can ask for whatever we want. But what are we going to want? Why, the good of everyone because we're no longer selfish. And so that will be given to us, because it won't be true that then I'm not going to need anything.”

I: “And later he says the Father will give us everything we ask in his name. In his name means in his spirit. It's the same thing he said before, to ask, being united in accordance with his teachings (which are the teachings of equality, as Oscar has said). I think we shouldn't overlook what Jesus says in the Gospel about prayer, as if it were nonsense; I believe in prayer. So why can we obtain whatever we want? Because with Jesus we are united with God, Love, the author of the universe, author of evolution, and of the revolution, which is the same thing.”

I love you, just as my Father loves me; continue, then, in the love that I have for you.

OSCAR: “Ernesto, we talk a lot about love at every Mass, but love isn't just something you say with your lips. I don't know, but I understand it that way, that love shouldn't just be talk; love must be unity. I see a cow looking for the other cows, a duck wants to be with the other ducks, a fish always goes with the rest of the fish. And how much more for humanity, we ought to be all together, united.”

I: “Love is equality, as Oscar said, and Jesus says that when he tells us to love one another with the love he has for the Father, which is the love for the infinite equality of the Trinity. He says that he loves us with that love, and that we must live in that love, that is: in community, as he is with the Father.”

If you obey my commandments, you will continue in this love that I have for you, as I obey the commandments of my Father and continue in the love he has for me.

I: “He says he obeys the commandments of his Father, and that we must obey his commandments. But they are not different commandments. When he does what the Father commands he continues in love, and when we do what he commands we continue in love, because what he commands and what the Father commands are love.”

OLIVIA: “It seems that they are the same commandment, because the Father ordered Christ to give his life for us, and Christ orders us to do the same thing that his Father ordered him to do: give his life for others.”

I: “And right here he explains what is his commandment (and his Father's).”

My commandment is this: love one another as I love you.

OSCAR: “I'm going to say just one thing: nowadays people just think about themselves and all the others aren't worth a damn. If we want to be like Christ, a revolutionary, we have got to sincerely forget about ourselves. And I think we can do it, be the same as him, because he was the son of a woman from here on earth. Mary can be any one of these women right here. Any one of them can also be a saint, a Mary, too, just like her, and from any one of them he can be born, if we follow his teachings. We have Che Guevara as an example, and not only him, but many who have died; those are the ones that carried out the teachings that Christ came to preach.”

ANDREA, his wife: “It's words you have to use to make the biblical changes, not violence.”

LAUREANO: “When Jesus went to drive out the Pharisees that were selling and changing money in the temple, he drove them out with a rope.”

PANCHO: “Yes, if anybody had opposed him or tried to kill him, maybe he would have killed them; but there was no need to kill anybody, they all ran away from him.”

“Now they don't run away; instead they attack, and then you have to do what the Christians do, who go up into the mountains. But they don't go seeking any advantage for themselves, they go to kill, which is using violence with love. It's not as if you were going to kill in order to seize a rich person's goods.”

WILLIAM: “It's revolutionary violence.”

OSCAR: “But I think love can also kill: if some bastard is raising hell, and I see that he's ruining everybody, I'll kill him because I don't believe it's a sin.”

I: “For example, if you have to protect your children.”

GLORIA: “Out of love.”

OSCAR: “Yes, because if I see them ruining my kids and I kill, it's out of love. Yes, because Christ talks like that with parables. Because how do we know he wouldn't have done the same, defending love.”

OLIVIA: “Notice, now, that evil is a sin, and Christ was called the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, and in some way or other you've got to take away the sins of the world so that love can reign, so that peace can reign. So it has to be, however it happens, so that love will triumph, because the others are killing good people for the fun of it.”

OSCAR: “How many guys are fighting for a new society and they kill them like dogs, guys that everybody ought to help, and they kill them like dogs. Those bastards do deserve to be cut off the grape plant which is Christ. I'll kill anybody that opposes me, just because I'm defending my love, and that's what he came to teach, and if I fall, well, I fall out of love.”

LAUREANO: “Whenever guerrilla fighters have been struggling for justice they've treated their prisoners very well, often better than their own fighters; for example, taking care of the wounded and giving them medicines that maybe afterwards they were going to need for themselves.”

OSCAR: “Why do they do that? Because they really carry out what Christ came to teach. But if they fall into the hands of those bastards who knows

what'll happen to them.”

OLIVIA: “From the beginning of the world good people have been dying at the hands of evil people.”

PANCHO: “Notice that the guys that are fighting for justice don't want to kill anybody. They'd like to make the change on a friendly basis, but they can't. And before thinking of killing, they've decided to offer their lives.”

The greatest love that you can have is to give your life for your friends.

FELIPE: “He says for your friends; he doesn't say for everybody, for people that are bastards.”

WILLIAM: “I don't think it has such a limited sense, referring only to your close friends. I think it refers to all of humanity.”

I: “He's talking about giving your life for those you love, but you can love even people you don't know.”

“Che said you had to feel any injustice committed anywhere in the world as if it was on your own flesh, and he died for people that didn't know him.”

“They didn't even imagine he existed.”

“But he really loved them because he died for them.”

ELVIS: “I can understand that your friends can be people you don't know; all exploited people can be friends. But for exploiters to be friends, that's crap.”

BOSCO: “Revolutionaries are even dying for people that aren't born. For all of humanity.”

WILLIAM: “And even for people who are all screwed up, too. The interesting thing about what we've seen is that humanity is a single organism; that's what Jesus has told us with the country image of the grape plant. And if we're a single organism, we live only if we're united to the others, to separate us is to kill us.”

A Guevara girl: “Humanity is the plant of love.”

101.

Supper Talk V

(Luke 22:24–38)

Luke relates a conversation at table that is different from John's. He says that the disciples were arguing about which of them was most important, and Jesus said to them:

> *The kings of nations govern them like owners, and their leaders are called benefactors. But among you it must not be that way*.

"This hasn't changed yet among us. Here we have a man who treats us like slaves, and who is called Benefactor."

"And also Honorable, Father of the Country, Leader of the Second Independence, and who knows what else."

"Here Jesus is talking about a total change."

"Jesus wanted a regime completely opposite to the one there was then and also the one we have now."

"Does that mean we have to change it as soon as possible?"

"Of course. It's a regime that hasn't changed a bit."

"I'm forty-eight or -nine and I don't remember any other one."

I: "At that time the Roman emperor was called 'Benefactor of the whole globe of the earth.' Christ is clearly talking here against the Roman empire, and against all kings, and even against all authority. The society that he wants is the perfect communist society in which there will be no such thing as a state."

"Fidel has always said it's dangerous in a revolution for a single man to have much authority, that a revolution cannot revolve around one man, that

we mustn't make a man into a god. And he's taking steps to distribute the power that he's been given, so that all the power will belong to the people."

I: "At the beginning of a revolution it's necessary to have leaders, but afterwards they have to disappear. When I was in Chile a monk who belonged to MIR [Revolutionary Leftist Movement] told me that when Christ said to Pilate, 'I am king,' he was telling him that the people is king. The revolutionary leaders are precursors of the people, as John the Baptist was of Christ. Every revolutionary leader ought to say about the people what John the Baptist said about Christ: 'It is well that I decrease so that he may increase.'"

"And why were they arguing about who was most important? It's because at that supper they were talking about the kingdom; they were arguing about who would have most power. They didn't know it was a kingdom in reverse: a revolution."

> *On the contrary, the one who is most important among you must become like the youngest; and the one who commands must become like the servant*.

FELIPE: "And what'll it be like, the youngest? Will the one who commands be like that one that Christ wants?"

LAUREANO: "You have to know what the young people were like at that time. Why, they were like slaves. They were slaves to their parents. That's the reason for the comparison with the young."

ALEJANDRO: "It's putting yourself at the disposal of others. When there are several adults and one young person, the young person is always doing the errands and taking orders from everybody."

OLIVIA: "A day will come when to rule in Nicaragua will mean to be good for all the people."

ALEJANDRO: "He doesn't say nobody ought to rule; he says to rule ought to be to serve."

I: "And the young are also the most revolutionary."

FELIPE: "I like what Jesus says, that the bosses ought to be like the young. He's telling us young people to go on being what we are. And also for the old to be young."

LAUREANO: "I'd just like to point out that if we want to be important we have to serve each other."

Who, then, is most important, the one who is sitting at the table, or the one who serves? Isn't it really the one who is at the table? But I am among you like the one who serves.

I: “He had washed their feet, which was something that servants did.”

“At present, capitalism is the one that's seated, and the poor person is the one that's waiting on tables.”

“Then everyone will be equal, nobody will rule others, a society of equality will be created.”

“He was coming to change things around. If he had come as a lord, to be waited on, he wouldn't have brought anything new.”

“In a community there are always people who are ready to lend their services. Those are the real leaders.”

“Fidel has said that in the revolution you don't aspire to command; to command is a responsibility that the community imposes on you.”

“It seems to me Jesus is telling them that he is serving them at the table not only because he has washed their feet but also because he has given them his body delivered up for others, and his blood spilt for others, in the Eucharist.”

“And it seems to me that it's also because the social change that he brings is like a banquet for the whole earth.”

You are the ones that have been with me in my trials. Therefore I give you a kingdom, as my Father gave it to me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

“The leaders of the new people.”

“So they're talking of a change there.”

“A new society.”

“I think he's talking not just to them but to all those who are going to serve, going to follow his example.”

“I think everyone who serves is an apostle.”

“Well, what he's saying, that everyone should serve others, is a new social system. A government that operates in accordance with the Gospels, that's the revolution. I see all of Nicaragua changing. The people are going to be different from what they are now.”

“But these people are already different, the people in this Solentiname community. Look at how the people of San Carlos are: totally alienated. In their political meetings you're not going to see Solentiname people. Solentiname people, where they meet is here. You're not going to see people from here mixed up in their politicking, not these people. And they say: Well, the Solentiname people didn't come! The long-haired ones didn't show! And they realize that the people from here have freed themselves with this book. They're different people. You can't fool them any longer with the Benefactor, the way you can fool the San Carlos people. These people are already different people.”

“Why sure, you can see the evil in their faces. And all their talk is empty; they themselves don't take it seriously.”

“Jesus is offering thrones, but those thrones aren't like the ones the kings used to use. They're like the thrones of the young, of the kingdom of love. Of course, having everybody living in unity, that's the throne that Christ promises us. For us all to be equal, for everybody to work for the good of everybody, and not each one for her or himself.”

“He promises a great feast; he talks of food and drink (I like the drink part especially). That means an abundance, and joy for everyone. Joy, the feast of humanity.”

“It seems to me that that eating and drinking, that abundance and joy of that feast, is a liberated humanity where people eat equally, where there's love. Because at present this isn't love, with some on one side and the rich on the other. You can't have a feast for everybody now. Not until all the things on earth belong to everybody can we have the feast that Christ wants on the earth. As long as there's no love, there's no kingdom, there's no feast.”

I: “He says they're going to judge the people. In the Bible ‘judge’ is a liberating chieftain. The judges in the Book of Judges weren't magistrates, they were liberators. It's clear that they imparted justice, but it was by freeing the oppressed from their oppressors. The Last Judgment, we've already seen, is the last liberation. The twelve tribes is the new people, all of humanity.”

“When I sent you out without bag, purse, or shoes, did you lack anything?” They said: “Nothing.” Then he said to them: “Well, now, on the other hand, let him who has a bag take it, and also a purse; let

him who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. Because I tell you that what the Scriptures say must be fulfilled in me: 'And they numbered him among the evildoers.' For all that is written about me has to be fulfilled." Then they said to him: "Lord, here are two swords." And he answered: "That is enough."

I: "It's not known exactly what that last phrase of Christ means: 'That is enough.' There are several interpretations. Some translate it as 'It's sufficient,' as if meaning that those two swords were sufficient. But that makes no sense; two swords couldn't be sufficient, and besides he had just told them that each one should have a sword. Others say that the 'That is enough' was said ironically. Others believe that he said: 'Enough!' cutting off the conversation brusquely, displeased because they weren't understanding him, believing that he was talking about material swords. But that doesn't seem logical to me either, because if they weren't understanding him he should have explained himself better. Others think he simply said: 'That's enough talking,' and that seems to me most logical, for they immediately got up from the table and went away."

WILLIAM: "I see there are two disciples who were armed. Swords are used only to kill; they're not like machetes, which are also used for work. Swords, like pistols, are only for killing."

LAUREANO: "It seems to me it's because they were going underground. They couldn't go around in public anymore; the people wouldn't feed them."

I: "He says they are numbering him among the evildoers, which means among the subversives, among the bandits."

JULIO CASTILLA: "He might mean: there's nothing to do now but take up arms, because they think of us as bandits."

TERESITA: "And if they don't have money let them get it from the bank?"

WILLIAM: "I think Laureano is right: they have to arm themselves; how are they going to keep on fleeing?"

I: "It has always been considered that Jesus is talking here in a figurative sense, that he is not talking of material swords."

ALEJANDRO: "But he's talking about practical, concrete things, quite real: the purse, the money, the knapsack. Why do the swords have to be spiritual?"

ELVIS: “I see it quite clearly: He's telling them that times have changed. They used to go around stirring up everybody's consciences and they were well received, but now the government won't allow it and they're beginning to persecute them, and they're going to have to go underground and they're going to have to take up arms to defend themselves.”

“The cloak was a garment they wore over their clothes, like an overcoat, and they could sell it and still have clothes on.”

“There was a tunic and there was a cloak.”

“The mantle was more elegant.”

“They could have had more than one; if they only had one, they must have walked around stinking.”

“I think he could be talking rather of the future. Because a just government was going to need swords to defend itself from the reactionaries, at least for a certain time.”

I: “The fact is that there are two swords, and he doesn't tell them that's not the point, that he was talking about spiritual swords.”

ALEJANDRO: “And who says he was telling a parable?”

I: “It has been traditionally interpreted that way, down through the centuries. Have you ever heard of Christ ever talking of taking up arms?”

TERESITA: “It's always been said that he was against all violence.”

LAUREANO: “The fact is that Peter went around with a sword, and if Christ didn't tell him to get rid of it, it's because he didn't disapprove of it.”

WILLIAM: “And to talk to them of ‘swords’ at such a moment when they were underground, and some of them were armed, without explaining to them that it was about spiritual swords, that was a little imprudent, wasn't it? There was a chance that the swords would be used, as in fact Peter used his a little later. And at any rate, if Christ was referring to spiritual swords and didn't explain it, we're not to blame if here and now we're interpreting it as we do.”

I: “He certainly must have seen the swords; and if he hadn't seen them, they told him they had them, and he didn't say: don't go around with weapons.”

LAUREANO: “Swords were like today's machine guns.”

WILLIAM: “One of the swords belonged to Peter, and when later he took it out in the olive grove, Jesus said to him: Put it away in its sheath. He didn't say: Throw it away.”

“Christ first sent them in peace, to stir up consciences, because he believed at the beginning that the kingdom would be accepted by everybody. Afterwards he realized it wasn't possible because of the class struggle.”

“Did he make a mistake?”

“He used a tactic that didn't work, and he changed it for another one.”

“At first he said the rich should give up their riches. But it really wasn't just about giving up riches. It was about changing the system of production.”

“Which is the same as giving up the riches. But what happened was that they didn't give them up.”

I: “It's interesting that at the Last Supper, where the Eucharist was established, they were armed. That's never been mentioned.”

LAUREANO, whose family is Protestant: “Protestants say the sword was the Bible. And that they had two Bibles, not two swords.”

I: “Then they would have said: Here we have a sword. Even when they had two copies of the Bible, the Bible is only one.”

WILLIAM: “Besides, that was a ‘sword’ that the enemies had too; the others were also armed with the Bible.”

LAUREANO: “Besides, the swords they had were to attack the others, because afterwards Peter floored that guy. With the sword he cut him down.”

“I think that Christ, from the time they told him they had two, realized they were lost. At least with the swords they were lost.”

“Since they only had two they were screwed.”

“Well, I wasn't present when you began to read this, but I'm reading here that it says: ‘This that the Scriptures say must be fulfilled in me: And they numbered him among the evildoers.’ It means they numbered him among the subversives. Maybe he's saying to them: Now you can carry arms, now we're subversives.”

ALEJANDRO: “Two swords were nothing, not even if the twelve of them were armed. But if they'd had two thousand swords, or twelve thousand, they still wouldn't have done anything. They would have waged a traditional war like the others.”

BOSCO: “And humanity had to go through stages.”

ALEJANDRO: “But now just a few weapons are enough to destroy a regime.”

I: “The truth is that at that time with swords you couldn't establish socialism or communism. There didn't yet exist what Marxism calls the objective conditions. But there *were* the subjective conditions, at least among them.”

ALEJANDRO: “He saw he was getting nowhere with armed struggle, and stirring consciences didn't work, and so all he had left to do was die.”

WILLIAM: “That doesn't mean that armed struggle is no good.”

I: “And his death changed history, and from then on came all the revolutions. All the changes that humanity has had have been due to his message. That has changed the objective conditions and the subjective conditions, and now two swords can accomplish something.”

BOSCO: “Why, man! Fidel began the struggle in the Sierra Maestra with only twelve men. You can say that with twelve swords he demolished Batista's tyranny.”

I: “Until a day comes when we're not going to need the sword, of course. Lenin says that in the perfect communist society there won't even be any police. Anything more?”

Nobody spoke.

I: “Then let us say with Jesus: That is enough.”

BOSCO: “On the walls of Managua you can see that phrase written even with coal, and on the highways of Nicaragua: THAT'S ENOUGH.”

I: “That could also be the meaning of Jesus’ phrase: THAT'S ENOUGH!”

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In the Olive Grove

(Matthew 26:36–56)

This time we had with us as visitors the Costa Rican theatre director Oscar Castillo, the Nicaraguan writer Sergio Ramirez, and the Argentinian novelist Julio Cortazar. At the beginning of the Mass they had stood at the back, near the entrance. After the Gospel had been read I had told them to come closer, because we were going to have what in other places they call a "round table."

> *Jesus arrived with his disciples at a place called Gethsemane. He said to them: "Sit here while I go ahead to pray."*

I: "He was in hiding there. He was already underground. He had just celebrated Passover secretly in Jerusalem. Judas revealed the place where he was hiding. The Gospel says that the ones who ordered the capture were the priests and the elders of the Jews. 'Elders' in those times meant the leaders, who were generally very old. Now, the leaders that we have are all very old in mind, even though they are young. The soldiers didn't know which one was Jesus; Judas told them he was going to kiss him so they would know who he was."

WILLIAM: "At that time it seems that it was the custom to kiss; it's still the custom in some countries. Or maybe it was a kind of embrace."

LAUREANO: "Like when Somoza embraced Sandino before he killed him. The traitor's embrace. Here it was a traitor's kiss. All the same."

OSCAR CASTILLO, the theatre director: "If other Masses were like this one I'd go every Sunday."

OLIVIA: “This is very important right now, because the authorities are always flattering some people and doing them favors, while they're sentencing others to death. And I think every leader has to be on guard, has to take precautions the way Jesus did.”

ESPERANZA: “Judas had already turned into an ear.”

I explained to our foreign visitors that in Nicaragua spies are called “ears.”

JULIO CORTAZAR: “What a good word! Clear.”

I: “We've always had them here. Ears are always coming around.”

ESPERANZA: “Judas had already made contact with Security.”

SERGIO RAMIREZ: “I'll bet that wasn't the first thing he did.”

OSCAR CASTILLO: “If it wasn't the first it was the worst.”

Going a little farther away, he fell on his face to the ground, and he prayed saying: “Father, if it is possible, take from me this cup, but it is not what I want but what you want that should be done.”

I: “Mark says he used the word ‘Abba,’ which in Aramaic means ‘papa,’ the name used by children who are beginning to talk. In the Old Testament God is never called ‘Father.’ On the other hand that's the only thing Jesus called him; he never used the word ‘God.’ And it seems besides that he only called him ‘Papa,’ he didn't even call him ‘Father,’ which must have been even more scandalous. It has been established that in the time of Jesus young people and adults could also use that childish expression to call their fathers, as we also frequently call our fathers ‘papa’ or ‘dad’; and they also used to use this for the oldest or most respected ones. On one occasion Jesus told his disciples that they shouldn't call anyone ‘Papa’ except God.”

GLORIA: “The Papa is love, and that is the only will that he respects. He only wants to love what love loves.”

OLIVIA: “The Father has given that token to the Son, the token of love. Because he wants liberation, and liberation could come only through his death. Society couldn't be changed, the world couldn't be changed, made different, without that death. Death horrifies everyone; he felt that horror; he wanted another way out, but there was no other way out.”

I: “Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews says that this prayer that Jesus said with great cries and tears was heeded. How are we to understand this?”

ESPERANZA: “Because he was resurrected.”

FELIPE: “This prayer of Jesus is the prayer of every revolutionary, even though they don't address God and they don't call him papa like Jesus or anything else, but their feeling is the same: they don't want to suffer, but they are ready for torture, death, any kind of death.”

We read that later Jesus found them asleep, and he said to Peter:

Be wakeful and pray so that you will not fall into temptation.

LAUREANO: “The temptation to not give his whole self, to want not to die and to remain withdrawn without doing what he had to do.”

I: “Jesus was having that temptation, and that's why he was praying.”

ALEJANDRO: “And he says it mainly to Peter, because he knew that Peter was the most apt to fall into that temptation, and not to let himself be screwed.”

I: “Very true. That temptation Jesus had had in the desert: that of being a triumphant Messiah. Later, when he spoke of going to Jerusalem to die, Peter scolded him telling him not to be a damned fool, and Jesus called him ‘Satan,’ because he was tempting him. And it seems that now Jesus is having the same temptation again, very strong: not to let himself be killed. And possibly to take up arms.”

JULIO CORTAZAR: “Logical. Given the extreme circumstances in which he had placed himself, it was the only alternative left to him.”

I: “The will of God is at times incomprehensible. Christ himself didn't understand it here, but he accepted it. The poet Coronel Urtecho has said that in Nicaragua it would seem that Divine Providence was on the side of Somoza.”

WILLIAM: “But from the revolutionary point of view, at times it's good to have an extreme oppression, so there can be a very radical change.”

Afterwards they come to arrest him, and Judas kisses him.

Jesus said to him: “Friend, why do you come?”

TERESITA: “Why would he call him friend?”

SERGIO RAMIREZ: “Because they were comrades.”

I: “What's your opinion, Teresita?”

TERESITA: “I'm asking. Can it be that he still considered him a friend?”

SERGIO: “There's a lot of irony here. Because he's betraying him, and they were comrades.”

I: “So there are two possibilities: that he said it with affection, or that he said it with irony.”

CORTAZAR: “I think he said it with irony, and that it was the harshest thing he could say to him. The proof is that only a few hours later Judas hangs himself.”

MANUELITO: “He didn't say to him: ‘Son of a bitch.’”

CORTAZAR: “So that he would realize what he had done, it was harsher to call him friend than to insult him. It was harsher.”

OSCAR CASTILLO: “Of course. When he called him friend he was calling him a traitor.”

SERGIO RAMIREZ (who had recently published *El pensamiento vivo de Sandino, The Living Thought of Sandino):* “When they were taking Sandino to be shot at Somoza's orders, Sandino said: ‘But we're friends; I've just had supper with him, he gave me an inscribed photograph.’ ”

I: “It's now believed that Judas’ betrayal was not really for money, as the Gospel simplistically presents it, but rather because he became disillusioned with Christ. Christ had previously said that he congratulated the one who was not disillusioned with him. And it seems that this was also the reason for Peter's rejecting him. Judas’ nickname, Iscariot, seems to have meant ‘zealot’ (guerrilla fighter). He probably belonged to that movement which believed in armed struggle, but which had the same religious ideology as the Pharisees. The kind of kingdom that Jesus was bringing was not at all to his liking, and he switched sides.”

WILLIAM: “The business about the coins could have been symbolic; he wanted the power, but the money, too, because power and money can't be separated.”

I: “The thirty silver coins that the Gospel mentions were, in Jesus’ time, scarcely a laborer's wages, as we might now say fifteen pesos, so Judas couldn't have betrayed him for that amount. The Gospel is referring to a text of Zechariah where it said that the prophet's price is thirty silver coins, which at that time was the price of a slave. As we might now say, the price of a horse. But what Judas received must have been more, for the Gospel says that with that money they bought a lot near Jerusalem to make a cemetery.”

CORTAZAR: “The Evangelist was probably using a metaphor, as we also use it when somebody sells himself to the enemy and we say he sold himself for thirty pieces of silver.”

WILLIAM: “But the money also played its part then, although the first reason was disillusion with the revolutionary cause. Everyone who abandons the revolutionary struggle and goes over to the other side receives a prize.”

DONALD: “Judas betrayed not only a man, he betrayed a people, his own people.”

FELIPE: “The kingdom that he wanted was the kingdom of the capitalists, and he wanted to be a minister in it, and he became disenchanted with Jesus when he saw that his kingdom was the kingdom of the poor.”

WILLIAM: “All the betrayals that the church leaders have committed have been like this one of Judas (Judas was also a bishop): because of not believing in the kingdom of Christ, of the poor; because of preferring domination to liberation; and finally, for money also.”

OLIVIA: “And the people are then crucified.”

FELIPE: “I believe the main cause is always money. Because they prefer money to humanity. The ones who own slaves always own them because they have money; the poor are sold for money; women are forced to sell their bodies for money; even wars are for money. That's why Fidel in Cuba is trying to suppress money and he says the day will come when money won't exist.”

OLIVIA: “Money is the blood of the poor.”

WILLIAM: “It's true. Why, in Managua there's even a business that sells the blood of the poor.”

I: “It belongs to Somoza in partnership with a Cuban. Its raw material is the poor, who sell a pint of plasma for 35 pesos (five dollars). The blood is sent abroad, where they sell it for a much higher price. With the Vietnam War and the other wars the demand is very great. It's said they're going to open branches in other cities. The company makes several million in annual profits.”

CORTAZAR: “In liquid gains. It's a vampire's business.”

ALEJANDRO: “Judas saw that Jesus was completely against the system. And then he sees that he can't belong to that movement. Jesus was a revolutionary, and Judas was a reactionary.”

One of Jesus' companions drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the chief priest.

I: "John says that the companion was Peter. This reminds me of Indalecio Pastora, who was a guerrilla fighter about fifteen years ago, and was operating in this area, on the opposite bank. He would cut an ear off spies and let them go free (maybe that's the origin of the nickname 'ear'). The first time he did it he sent an ear to the government newspaper, and the paper made a great fuss, horrified, presenting him as a monster of cruelty. In fact he was very humanitarian, since he let them go free. Indalecio is a wonderful person; I later became his friend."

ALEJANDRO: "Could it be then that Peter only wanted to cut off an ear and not that he didn't know how to handle the sword?"

OSCAR CASTILLO: "How nice to have all the spies going around with one ear missing."

OSCAR (the one from Solentiname): "I think Peter really went after him but the other guy ducked. Peter was really very violent. Christ walked humbly, and Peter was like any one of us can be, trying to defend someone who's showing us the good way. So let's say, let's take you for an example right now, that they come to screw you, you know you have your disciples, then, and that we're not capable of letting you get screwed. So then you scold us. That's the way Peter was, very violent. And he wasn't going to stand there with his arms crossed while they were arresting him. And—I've lost track."

WILLIAM: "It was Peter that they called the 'Terrorist.'"

OSCAR: "Sure, man, we can imagine him here, gosh! And even though you scold us because we won't let you get screwed. You say: No! No! No! Don't interfere here! Leave me be! And you scold us, you let yourself be taken away calmly and let them kill you; then you're showing us what love is."

Then Jesus said to him: "Put your sword in its scabbard. Because those who fight with the sword will die with the sword."

I: "This phrase, which others translate, 'he who lives by the sword will die by the sword,' has been used to condemn all violence, including revolutionary violence."

FELIPE: “I think he's indicating another method of fighting: that a new society can be created without our killing each other.”

“That's a lot of bullshit. How are we going to bring down Somoza except with swords?”

SERGIO RAMIREZ: “I believe Jesus has chosen his way of struggling, which is his death. He doesn't want others to intervene, preventing him from converting his death into a symbol, that death he has been gradually preparing, as a form of action. And following the parallel with Sandino: when Sandino is captured he says the same thing. Estrada and Umanzor take out pistols to defend themselves, and he tells them not to, to put down their arms, that they mustn't fight at this moment. And I believe that Sandino also has already chosen his death as a way of struggling.”

I: “What do you say, Laureano? I see that you don't seem to like this verse.”

LAUREANO: “I don't like it.”

I: “Should we erase it, then? Up to now we haven't erased any verse of the Gospels.”

OSCAR CASTILLO: “Maybe what happened there was that there was no point in fighting because they were ruined. Not only was he going to die but the others too, all for nothing.”

CORTAZAR: “Yes, I agree with what Oscar says, that it was a tactical decision that they had to make at that moment so that the disciples would survive; if not, they would have killed them all. It says here that they left Jesus and fled; if they didn't flee at that moment, all this wouldn't exist today.”

SERGIO: “They were in a minority there and they'd have got screwed.”

FATHER JAIME, the Colombian priest: “I agree about the tactic. And besides I believe we mustn't try to apply each one of the verses of the Gospels to the situation in which we're living, as if the situation were the same, when at times it can be very different. What he says here about the swords is a practical decision. He's simply telling them: Put them aside.”

FELIPE: “I wasn't saying that weapons were bad; I was saying that Jesus had shown another way of struggling, the way of love. And this method, revolutionaries can use it even though they're armed. They're really waging a war so there won't be any more wars. They want a society in which people won't kill each other.”

I: “Once I was talking in Berlin, in the University, or rather I was having a dialogue with the public, and among those present was Sergio Ramirez, who is here with us now. And a girl asked me sharply how I could defend armed struggle when Christ had forbidden the use of the sword, and she left the room in anger without waiting for my answer. Before I replied to the public, while they were still translating for me what she had said in German, Sergio Ramirez answered (with a phrase that I have repeated other times, quoting him): ‘Christ forbade the sword but not the machine gun.’”

SERGIO: “I don't remember that, but it's very good.”

I: “It amused everyone a great deal; but I said that this wasn't a joke but a very theological interpretation. Christ here disapproves of the sword, but not for moral reasons (as Jaime just said) but because it's useless. That doesn't mean that he condemns other weapons, used by other people, in other circumstances. ‘He who lives by the sword will die by the sword’ means simply: ‘if we kill we get killed.’ We might also add that the Gospel According to Saint Luke told that at the Last Supper Jesus spoke of enlisting swords, and they told him they had two and he didn't disapprove. And here where they were traveling in hiding there were those two swords, and he knew it. In his version of this passage, Luke also tells that when the police arrived they consulted him: ‘Lord, shall we attack with swords?’ So it seems that Jesus had not made a clear decision about complete non-violence, at least to his disciples. The fact is that there were just two swords to confront that squad of guards, and in back of them was the whole Roman Empire. But right here Jesus also gives another reason. Let's read on.”

> *Don't you know that I could ask my Father, and he would send me right now more than twelve legions of angels? But in that case, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say that it must happen like this?*

I: “It's rare for Christ to say that he acts in a certain way because it was so prophesied, when the logical thing is to think that it was prophesied because that's the way he was going to do it. Maybe someone can explain it. I have brooded about this at other times and I find no answer to it.”

CORTAZAR: “It's a very, very obscure passage that would have to be analyzed in relation to the whole of the Gospels. But it's evident that Jesus’ whole life gradually fulfills one after the other all the prophecies that have been made about him; let's say that he is faithful to the prophecies, to a

preconceived plan, and so he can't fail to fulfill the last one, which is his death. It would be a contradiction on his part to ask for twelve divisions of angels to come; he can't do it, he doesn't want to do it.”

OLIVIA: “I believe that up to a certain point it's like he says, that it had to be fulfilled; but that doesn't mean we should shrug off humanity's problem, that the well-being that ought to be for all of humanity is enjoyed by only a few. We've got to act on our own account.”

OSCAR CASTILLO: “I think that is only one more argument to reinforce the tactical decision that he has made, to convince the Apostles, to tell them: Let things run their course.”

SERGIO: “Not that angel business, it seems to me.”

OSCAR: “It's a metaphor.”

SERGIO: “I think Olivia is right; I think rather that he's telling us that in the struggle we mustn't put all our trust in the angels, that the angels have nothing to do with our struggle for freedom, they're no good.”

CORTAZAR: “A very tendentious interpretation, it seems to me.”

SERGIO: “He's facing a world situation, the social problem of the earth. Besides I think not even he thought that twelve armies of angels would come, twelve divisions of angels to help him there.”

CORTAZAR: “Who knows? At that time angels were very effective, because they frequently intervene in the Bible.”

SERGIO: “In the Old Testament, fifteen hundred years before, but not in the New.”

CORTAZAR: “I'm not so sure about the New, but in the Old their effectiveness is proven.”

SERGIO: “The situation of the Jewish people was different; those military angels of the Old Testament were no longer in existence, and they were occupied by the Romans just as Puerto Rico is occupied, just as Nicaragua was under an army of occupation in 1927. And Christ knew that the Roman legions couldn't fight against legions of angels. It was something that made no sense.”

FATHER JAIME: “I find a great similarity with the case of the Colombian priest Camilo Torres, who saw that he had to die to awake the revolutionary consciousness of the people, that that was his fate. He saw, we might say, that his fate was written. As for the angels, I think we would have to try to say in our present vocabulary what was differently expressed in another way.”

FELIPE: “I think it made no sense to have a bunch of angels come, because if a bunch of angels was going to come they should have come at the beginning. But they wouldn't have done anything, because what Christ wanted was to raise the consciousness of the people, so they would be conscious of their own slavery. And if the angels came to free them, and they didn't free themselves, they wouldn't be free.”

I: “The Jesuit scientist Teilhard de Chardin says that the reason there is grief in the world is evolution, that God couldn't have created a universe without suffering and without death, since he chose to make it by means of evolution. Marx has also said that humanity was forced to pass through various stages of oppression in its evolution (slavery, feudalism, capitalism). And now I see that Christ is saying the same thing. The angels could have come at the beginning, as Felipe says, but then the Scriptures wouldn't have been fulfilled, which in today's language is equivalent to saying that the laws of evolution and of history wouldn't have been fulfilled.”

SARA: “I want to know why Sandino died. I already know that he died to free a people. But we always stop there.”

SERGIO: “Sandino also knew that he had to die. There's a phrase of his very much like Christ's phrase: ‘I never thought I would come out of this war alive, but I have always believed the war was necessary.’ He knew that his death was the only thing that could keep his struggle alive.”

SARA: “But they go on dying.”

SERGIO: “Sandino's example is very recent. Christ died two thousand years ago, and they still go on dying. But there is Christianity and Sandinism.”

SARA: “But that's where we always wind up!”

I: “Sandino knew he had to die so that certain Scriptures would be fulfilled, and Che knew this, too. And it will still be necessary for some time for others to have to die, until the Scriptures are finally fulfilled. But what's interesting is that these Scriptures have also said that the world will have a definitive liberation from all oppression.”

OLIVIA: “Even from death.”

CORTAZAR (after a silence): “And after this there is nothing to add.”

103.

Jesus before the Sanhedrin

(Matthew 26:57–68)

Those who arrested Jesus led him before Caiaphas, the chief of the priests, where the teachers of the law and the elders were gathered.

BOSCO: “This looks like the Military Court that's operating in Managua.”

WILLIAM: “In this case it had the same functions.”

I: “The Supreme Court, or Sanhedrin, was composed of three groups: the chief priests and other representatives of the priesthood, the legal experts, or scribes, and the elders, or secular rulers. The three groups are mentioned here, indicating that it was a plenary session. There were seventy-one members. Mark adds that ‘all’ were present. They gathered at night, in an emergency session. They had to make haste, condemning Jesus right in the middle of Passover, for fear of a riot, and the session was in Caiaphas’ house, and not in the Sanhedrin building. In the Gospel the story of the trial is very brief, but it was a debate that went on all night. None of Jesus’ disciples were there, and maybe that's why the narrative is very concise. The disciples found out what was said only by hearsay, through some people who were present. Perhaps some of them defended Jesus, but the Gospel doesn't record this. John says that Jesus was earlier taken to the house of the former high priest, Annas. The historian Josephus says that Annas had the joy of seeing raised to the high priesthood his five sons, his son-in-law Caiaphas, and his grandson. It seems that what occurred in Annas’ house was a preliminary interrogation. They probably asked Jesus his name, age, profession or trade. That's the way they begin questioning in the Military Court.”

“Maybe he answered the same way as Tomas Borge in the Military Court: ‘Profession, revolutionary.’”

The chief priests, the elders, and the whole Supreme Court were seeking some accusation against Jesus, even though it was false, to condemn him to death.

The Costa Rican poet MAYRA JIMENEZ: “Not only here in Nicaragua, as our comrade has pointed out, but in many other countries of Latin America the same thing goes on now. Those who are struggling for freedom are taken before courts. Not to judge them and hear their defense but to condemn them. And as they can't accuse them of wanting the freedom of humankind, they seek false charges. They plant weapons in their houses to say they belong to them.”

FELIPE: “At that time Christ was all alone. Now there are many Christs being sentenced in many places.”

IVAN: “He gave the example and he now has many followers.”

But they found no evidence, although many people appeared and told lies against him.

I: “Jesus has said so many subversive things, how is it that they couldn't find any evidence?”

FELIPE: “It's just that everything that Jesus said was the truth. Even though he was against them, it was the truth, wasn't it? So they couldn't accuse him.”

I: “That's right. He was talking in the same vein as the prophets, as the whole Bible. The whole Old Testament was subversive. That's why they couldn't find any evidence.”

WILLIAM: “They made it up afterwards, the way they always do. They make it up on the basis of false testimony or they simply torture the prisoners and make them sign a confession.”

I: “They couldn't condemn him for being on the side of the poor or against the rich. So they had to invent something. It says here that many people told lies against him. The Gospel doesn't say what things they said against him, but maybe we can imagine them.”

JULIO CASTILLA, a laborer from Juigalpa: “Like it happens here. They accuse them of being communists. It seems to me they were treating Jesus

like a communist.”

TERESITA: “It probably was because they'd made the people believe communism was something bad and that's why they were condemning him.”

I: “He had given evidence that would now be an equivalent of communism. But the Bible was communist too. He was talking about the ‘kingdom,’ and the prophets had described that kingdom as the perfect communist society. So he was in agreement with all the Bible.”

ALEJANDRO: “What they might have said is the same as they're now saying, that he was a bandit.”

ADAN: “They could have accused him also of being against Caesar and the imperial authorities, right?”

I: “But that couldn't be a crime for them, at least for the nationalists among them. They accused him of that later before Pilate, but here they were judging him in their religious council and they couldn't accuse him of something that was in agreement with the Bible. They had to accuse him as a criminal, just as when they now want to accuse someone of being a communist, they accuse that person of being a criminal or a bandit. They want to make people believe, as Teresita says, that being a communist is being a criminal, a murderer, and a bandit. Well, that's probably what they were saying about Jesus, but they had no proof. They may have accused him also of leading an evil life. Earlier in the Gospel we've seen that the Pharisees spoke against him because he went around with sinners and prostitutes. So they probably poked into his private life. But it says here they had no proof.”

> *But finally two false witnesses came forward, and they said: “This man said: ‘I can destroy the temple of God, and raise it again in three days.’”*

I: “So they accuse him on account of the temple. He had just taken over the temple, as we saw last Sunday. He went into the temple in a commando action, and they're probably referring to that in the trial. But they couldn't really accuse him of that, of driving out the merchants. He had done this by citing the Bible prophets. They couldn't accuse him of purifying the temple of those corruptions. So they accuse him of trying to destroy the temple.”

FELIPE: “Those people were like many people today who give more importance to a house than to a human being. They were giving a lot of importance to that house, that temple, which is like saying this church, as though that was ruining the people. There are others who are ruining the people and killing people and they don't accuse those people of anything. Let's suppose Jesus wasn't going to destroy that house, but Jesus was opposed to the idea of giving more importance to houses than to people's bodies. Jesus was fighting against that, just like Marx was, who struggled for humanity and not for a house.”

I: “Why, yes, and here the witnesses may be telling something of the truth, right? Because they couldn't condemn him for liberating the poor, but they find this crime, that he was against the temple, which for them was the most sacred thing. And they were right about that, because he was against the temple, and the earliest Christians had no temples. Where they were wrong was in saying he was going to destroy it like a terrorist. He put an end to it without any need of setting it on fire.”

MAYRA: “He called into question the image of God that they had at that time, and still have, and that serves the system; this is exactly the temple image. All the accusations made in societies of exploitation against the image of Christ are that same one, of wanting to destroy the temple. But temple meaning not only the religious one but also the temples of banking and power.”

I: “He was really coming to destroy religion. Because when the Samaritan woman asked him which of the two temples was the true one, that of Israel or that of Samaria, he told her neither of the two, that God would be adored in spirit and in truth, that is, people were going truly to love God in a society of love. God as love among people, and no longer the image of God held by the religions, the Jewish and the Samaritan and all the other pagan religions. This they *could* accuse him of. And the words quoted by those witnesses could easily have been said by him when he drove out the merchants.”

OSCAR: “Ernesto, I think they misunderstood, because it seemed to them it was the temple, the church, that Christ said he was going to destroy and rebuild in three days, but it seems to me that what he meant there was that he could build that temple in three days, and it was the whole world. With his death and his resurrection he was going to build it, or rather, that the world was going to change. That's the way I understand it.”

Then the chief priest rose and said to Jesus: “Have you no answer? What is it that they say against you?” But Jesus said nothing.

I: “Why do you suppose he kept quiet?”

BOSCO: “Hell, because it was true.”

I: “They put him between the devil and the deep blue sea. He couldn't say: it isn't true, I do not come to destroy the temple, I am religious.”

BOSCO: “He could have defended himself by saying that he wasn't coming to destroy the temple as a terrorist, setting fire to it, that he was coming to make a temple out of each person.”

I: “The way they accuse us here of terrorism, or that we're fomenting violence in the church, and we answer that we're making the revolution but in another way. We don't defend ourselves like that.”

ADAN: “Or maybe that he was against the Jewish religion and against Caesar too, because after all it was serving Caesar too, like the religions of today.”

I: “That's true. They made the two accusations, the religious accusation before this court, and the political one before the court of Pilate. It was really the same one, proclaiming himself the messiah, which for them was a religious crime and at the same time a political one, because the messiah had to be the king. Just as against us they can make an accusation at the same time religious and political. They did it to us when the Head of Customs in Managua sent a telegram to all the customs houses in the country forbidding the importing of the first volume of our *The Gospel in Solentiname*, because it was a very harmful book that ‘by means of the Gospel tries to preach communism to the people.’”

Then the chief priest said to him: “In the name of the living God, I put you under oath to tell the truth. Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him: “Yes, I am, as you have said.”

FELIPE: “He couldn't keep quiet any longer. He couldn't say he wasn't the messiah.”

I: “I think that when he was silent about the temple he was letting them know it was true and that's why Caiaphas asked him if he was the Christ, which in Greek means ‘messiah.’ The accusation about the temple was an accusation that he was claiming to be the messiah or Son of God.”

BOSCO: “He had already accepted his death as one way of fighting, because he knew he had to die, and that's why he didn't avoid that question. He knew that was how far he had come.”

I: “And then later he tells Pilate: I'm the king. Before then he hadn't wanted them to call him Christ in public or to proclaim him king.”

BOSCO: “Did they give you a Bible to swear on? Did they make you swear when you went to the Military Court?”

I: “You swear but not with the Bible.”

WILLIAM: “At first he told them to be quiet for tactical reasons, but now he knows he's already condemned, and those tactics are no good now. That's why he tells them: Yes, I'm the liberator.”

NATALIA: “The same thing happened to Christ as happened to Che: he died, but he didn't die; he's always up ahead of us.”

I: “He knew that his freedom was going to come after his death and because of his death, like the case of Che that Natalia mentions and of all who die for freedom. The Jews believed that in the messianic era there would be a new temple, a heavenly sanctuary that would descend upon the earth. After declaring that he is the messiah, Jesus continues speaking.”

> *And I also tell you that you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Almighty God, and coming on the clouds of heaven*.

“That means he was going to come as a judge, and judge in the Bible was the same as liberator: one who was coming to liberate the oppressed and take revenge on their oppressors. And the cloud bit is that he's going to come also as God. The cloud is an image always associated with God in the Bible. And whenever the prophets announced a liberation of the people (and the punishment of their oppressors) they described God as coming among clouds to make a ‘judgment.’ So Jesus is saying that he is the messiah and that he is coming to establish justice on earth. He is also alluding to the Book of Daniel, in which is described the vision of a mysterious person ‘like a son of man,’ who comes among the clouds of heaven to be king of all the earth.”

BOSCO: “You could interpret that coming as all the people now united—right?—who are going to judge the oppressors.”

I: “Yes, for we've already commented other times on this second coming, and we've seen that it will be the establishing of a just society, and the

people themselves will do that."

FELIPE: "A people now aware and transformed, right? Because a people without awareness can't do a thing."

I: "He's telling them: I'm going to come like a people, like a whole community that will establish the kingdom of God on earth."

ESPERANZA: "Ernesto, that makes me think of what lots of people say: What can people do, nothing! You've got to wait for Christ, for Christ to come and judge. That's the way lots of people think it will happen and that's the way we understood it here, at least I did: only when we see him come. And many people stick to that, saying what are guerrilla fighters going to be able to do, or anyone else? Only Christ will do it."

MAYRA: "And it occurs to me, Ernesto, that clouds have a lot to do with humidity, and humidity in ancient religions is always identified with fecundity and the origin of everything, and that Christ here is not only projecting himself toward the future but he is also going back into the past and he appears as the beginning of the fecundity of the universe and the origin of everything."

Then the chief priest tore his robes as a sign of indignation, and said: "This man has blasphemed. What need have we of more witnesses?"

I: "In former times the Jews had been accustomed to tear their clothes as a sign of grief. At the time of Christ the Pharisees preserved that custom only in religious matters: they tore their clothes when they heard anything offensive to God. The Last Judgment was reserved to God, and that was the 'blasphemy.' Besides, Jesus, who had identified himself with the poor, was at the same time identifying himself with God. And he was saying that the poor person, the working person, was God. And for those who have a different concept of God, this continues to be a blasphemy. That was indeed a very serious crime, to say that God was a worker. Through the Bible they knew that a messiah was going to come. But that this should be the messiah, this person that came to cast doubts on their religion, to take away their privileges, to change the state of affairs, that they could not accept."

FELIPE: "A lot of people think now too that the revolution is against God, because they identify God with the system."

“You have heard his blasphemies, what do you think?” They said: “He is guilty and he must die.” Then they spat on his face and they struck him.

I: “The ‘what do you think’ means that they now proceeded to the voting. According to Luke the trial didn't end until some time in the morning. It must have been after the trial ended that they started to beat him.”

MAYRA: “Nowadays when somebody is fighting for the people, they're also condemned to death. But before that they're subjected to many humiliations and tortures. There are many techniques for that.”

IVAN: “It's important, it seems to me, to see the risks they run.”

GLORIA: “It's tough to be a Christian, because anybody who's a Christian has to be ready for all that, those tortures. It's nice to say that I'm a Christian, but as for the rest…. ”

WILLIAM: “The ones on the Supreme Council were for God, they were for the Bible, but they weren't for any revolution. Many Christians now are also for those who condemned Jesus, right in the same camp with the Supreme Council. They're the ones that aren't for the revolution, the ones that condemn it.”

104.

Peter Denies Jesus

(Matthew 26:69–75)

We were in the meeting hut. We had had a lunch of rice and beans and turtle eggs with chile sauce and slices of fried shark, a shark that the Altamiranos had caught that morning in their nets. A brother of David Tejada was with us. In Nicaragua everybody knows the name of David Tejada, the young man from the Sandinista National Liberation Front who was brutally murdered in prison and then thrown into the boiling lava of the crater of the Masaya volcano.

I introduced David Tejada's brother. And I told how, in a Managua radio studio on a Friday in Lent, I had made a recording, later broadcast on Good Friday, in which I denounced the tortures and crimes that were committed in the jails and I said that while they were all carrying the statue of Christ through the streets in the procession of the Way of the Cross, the living Christ was suffering that Way of the Cross in the jails. Some time later I learned from some reporters that at the very hour in which I was recording those words on that Lenten Friday they were killing David Tejada.

> *Meanwhile Peter was sitting out in the courtyard and a servant came up to him and said: "You also were with Jesus of Galilee." But Peter denied it in front of everybody, saying: "I don't know what you're talking about."*

I: "The 'meanwhile' means that while they were judging Jesus inside and afterwards while they were beating him Peter was denying him outside. The Nicaraguan Church was also doing the same thing with David Tejada while

they were beating him with rifle butts and with steel chains. Shortly before that my bishop had forbidden me to write political articles and so I later wrote an article entitled “I Am Not Guilty of the Death of David Tejada,” implying that they were accomplices, the ones that could have spoken but kept silent, and I said that, at the washing of hands in the Mass, they could no longer recite the phrase from the Psalms: ‘I shall wash my hands among the innocent.’”

“Peter had done a lot of swaggering around. He felt he was pretty brave with the sword but when the moment came to offer up his life, he was a coward.”

“I don't think he did wrong. It was a strategy.”

“If somebody in the Front is questioned, they don't confess.”

“Yes, maybe he wasn't a coward but acted like a revolutionary because if he surrendered there he wouldn't have carried out what Christ had entrusted to him.”

“It seems to me he's doing the same as Jesus, who hadn't wanted to declare in public that he was the Christ, because that was very dangerous. Only at the end did he declare himself the Christ.”

I: “But the Gospel doesn't seem to approve of this denial by Peter, as you approve of it. It says that afterwards he wept bitterly.”

“Ernesto, it seems to me the boys are right. Peter denied knowing Jesus so as not to betray his leader. He saw that they'd arrested him, but he thought maybe they weren't going to kill him, and he denied everything so they couldn't get anything out of him. But when Peter saw that it was no use, that they were going to screw Jesus, he wept.”

“He wept because Jesus had told him he was going to deny him three times, but he hadn't told him whether that was going to be good or bad, and that's why he wept because what Jesus had told him had come true.”

“He wept because earlier he'd felt very brave, and Jesus had told him: you'll see that you yourself are going to deny me. And he'd seen that when the moment of truth came he was scared. But it's a fact that he didn't do any harm when he denied him because he wouldn't do any good by surrendering.”

“So then Jesus Christ didn't do any good either by surrendering?”

“He was already very leftist. And he didn't surrender; they arrested him. The others they hardly knew. They're saying that maybe Peter's one of them just by his way of talking.”

“And what do you suppose he was saying that they'd say: it's his way of talking? Because he was a fool! He was probably talking in revolutionary terms, in Christian terms.”

I: “By his way of talking they knew he was a Galilean. But Galilean to them was the same as revolutionary. Galilee was the place where rebellions and guerrilla warfare sprang up.”

“He denied Jesus because he was afraid, and he was afraid because he didn't believe in him.”

“I still don't believe it was through fear.”

“I say it was not through fear.”

I: “If not fear, why did he do it?”

“It wasn't through fear but because he understood there was no point in letting himself be killed just like that at that moment. Look, you're mixed up in a revolutionary movement, and some security police come and say to you: You're a revolutionary. Are you going to say yes to them?”

“You were with Carlos Fonseca.”

“Well, what I'd say is: No, man, God forbid I'd get mixed up in that.”

“Yes, I'm with Laureano. Remember, Oscar, that when you were in San Carlos with some spies, you said: Long live Somoza!”

“But there comes a time when you have to tell the truth.”

“Yes, sure, if they're going to kill me, sure. If I'm already caught. ‘You were mixed up in the Front.’ Son of a bitch! Caught there. ‘You were with so and so and what's his name.’ ‘Well, yes, I am. And you're the son of a bitch that's going to kill me.’ Now that's what I call coming clean.”

“But if you can get away you ought to.”

“He had an out. The proof is that he got out of it. It's not the same as if your back's to the wall and you're shouting ‘Long live Sandino! Long live Nicaragua! Go on, kill me.’”

“But the Gospel shows this like a weakness in Peter. There's got to be some other explanation for what he did, updating it of course with what's happening in Nicaragua, to be able to understand it.”

I: “The other time, when we were talking of Judas’ betrayal, we had seen that it seemed it wasn't due just to money but that he'd become disillusioned with Christ. Nowadays Peter's denial is also interpreted as disappointment in the cause of Christ. When he announced his Passion, Christ had said: ‘Happy is he who does not become disappointed in me!’ And that same night he had just said to the disciples after the supper: ‘All of you will lose

your faith in me tonight.’ We've already seen that the name of Peter, not Simon Bar-Jonah, as we used to think, but Simon the Terrorist, shows that he was a zealot. Peter had tried to dissuade Jesus from his Passion. He believed in a triumphant messiah but not in a suffering messiah that was letting himself be killed. At the supper Jesus had also expressly told Peter that he has prayed for him so that he won't lose faith, lose faith in Jesus as the messiah, in his liberation. And when Peter denies Jesus, what he's really doing is turning his back on the cause of Jesus.”

“Peter was violent. He wanted Jesus to defend himself and when he saw him surrendering so meekly he got sore.”

“And he was used to being brave. He was the bravest one in the whole group. He'd wanted to use his sword and when he saw that in spite of being brave he hadn't been able to follow Jesus, that's when he wept.”

“But if he didn't want to have anything more to do with that cause, what was he doing there?”

“He wanted to keep faith with Jesus right up to his death.”

“Maybe he was wavering.”

“You've got me all confused.”

“It seems to me, Ernesto, that if somebody gets disillusioned about a movement, the leader can say that he'll mess it all up. That's what Jesus told Peter when he told him he was going to deny him three times.”

“It was just fear.”

“No, it wasn't, man.”

“He was scared there. You know why? Because he saw himself all alone, surrounded by a bunch of bastards. Besides he felt guilty because he'd cut the ear off one of those sons of bitches.”

“We're talking about stupid things. What's important is that Christ had promised to come back to life in three days. The lesson is that we ought to follow Christ, and right up to death.”

“Die for the kingdom. And believe that even if you die you go on living.”

“Love is hard. Peter didn't know that love leads you to give yourself over. He found out later that love leads you to die and that, after all, dying is living more.”

105.

Jesus before Pilate

(John 18:28–40 and 19:1–16)

The Jews did not go into the palace in order not to become impure, for then they could not eat the Passover meal.

“They have scruples about entering a pagan house, but they have no scruples about taking Jesus there to be condemned to death. All they worried about was eating their Passover meal without ‘sin.’”

“The same thing happens nowadays. The rich are the most religious class.”

“They have scruples, from certain dimwits, about taking communion, but they have no scruples about exploiting, about killing innocent people with their exploitation.”

“It was people very conscientious about their religious duties that killed Jesus.”

“The charge they bring against him is that he was stirring up the people. I remember what General Somoza said a short while ago in his San Carlos speech, when he was on his electoral campaign: Don't let yourselves get fooled in Solentiname. He said that because he knows that here something good is developing.”

“Well, Solentiname is much on his mind now; before, he never mentioned Solentiname, as I remember. And now why is he talking to us in Solentiname? Why does he keep referring to Solentiname?”

“Because he knows Solentiname is coming out of obscurity, you see? That now you can't be fooled here very easily. The fact that he has mentioned this is an announcement of something.”

“Well, that he's going to screw us.”
“That was a political speech, once he said it he forgot it.”

Pilate came back into the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him: “Are you the king of the Jews?”

I: “They condemned Jesus for having declared himself the messiah. Pilate didn't care about that; for him it had something to do with the religion of the Jews; so they have to present that to Pilate as a political crime, because he was coming to change the world. In their court, which was a religious court, they had condemned him for religious crimes because he had declared himself the Son of God. Before the civil court they accuse him of having proclaimed himself king. It's like saying he's coming to make a revolution.”
“Pilate was something like the gringo ambassador here.”

Jesus said to him: “Do you ask this on your own account, or because others have said this to you about me?”

I: “He asks him this before answering him, and what he wants to tell Pilate is that it depends on what he understands by ‘king’: if he understands it as the Romans understand it, or as the Jews understand it. King as the Romans understand it he is not. King, messiah, as the Jews understand it, one who comes to change the world, that he is.”

Pilate answered him: “Am I perchance a Jew? Those of your nation and the chief priests are the ones who delivered you to me. What have you done?” Then Jesus answered: “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my followers would have fought so that I would not be turned over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not here.”

A Spanish priest who is visiting us: “He is telling him that his kingdom is not political. He tells him: Be calm, for I'm not against Rome. My mission is another direction.”
I: “He's telling him that his kingdom is political, but not with an army. You have to know what the word ‘world’ means in St. John's Gospel: it means sin, the world of injustice, the established order that we now call ‘the system.’ A little earlier, at the Supper, Jesus has told his apostles that they

are ‘in the world but are not of the world,’ which was like saying they were in the system but not part of it. The proof that Jesus gives to Pilate, that his kingdom is not of ‘this world,’ is that his followers have not fought to keep him from becoming a prisoner; but that's not a proof to show that his kingdom is not of this life or that it's not political. His kingdom was political but of a different order of politics. It wasn't political in the sense of the politics of that time; if it had been it would also have been a slave kingdom, and his kingdom was a revolution.”

“It seems to me that if he had assured Pilate that his kingdom was not political but ‘spiritual,’ Pilate wouldn't have condemned him. But Pilate was not reassured. He asked again.”

> *“So you're a king?” Jesus answered: “I'm a king, as you say. I was born for this and for this I came into the world, to say what is the truth. All those who obey the truth listen to what I say.”*

The Spanish visitor: “I think he's telling him again: Be calm, I'm not moving in that direction. My kingdom is not like those kingdoms of yours, we're not going to fight against Rome. It seems to me the answer he gives Pilate is very open and simple, but nowadays we want to interpret every word of Scripture as we choose.”

“If he'd told Pilate clearly that he doesn't meddle in politics, he's only preaching a religious doctrine so that people will go to heaven, Pilate wouldn't have condemned him. But he declares himself king, which is the same as declaring himself subversive.”

OLIVIA: “It seems to me that when they heard ‘kingdom’ all they thought of was a kingdom of injustice like their own kingdom, and he's telling them that their kingdom is a kingdom of love. But that didn't suit them either, the kingdom of love, because love is against injustice; and that's why the powerful still go on being against this kingdom of love; this revolution of love, they always fight against it because it doesn't suit them. For them, the kingdom of love is subversion.”

“The kingdom of God is liberty, and all the other kingdoms are oppression. That's why he has to make a distinction; that's why he says his kingdom's not part of that system.”

I: “But he was coming to change the whole system, not just to shake off Roman domination (that wouldn't have been a true revolution). And his

doctrine was not only coming to put an end to the slave system but also an end to feudalism and capitalism, and he's even going later to put an end to socialism, which isn't the most perfect system in humanity, until he creates the most perfect one, and that will be his kingdom."

RAUL: "I don't believe Christ's death was just a misunderstanding of Pilate and that his revolution was just 'spiritual,' as they've tried to picture it to us. The proof is that afterwards they persecuted the Christians just as much."

I: "His position was not that of the zealots, the guerrilla fighters of that time, that's clear. But they were accusing him before Pilate of being a zealot, and he preferred the confusion of considering him a zealot (and condemning him to death for it) to the confusion of considering his kingdom purely spiritual, apolitical, not revolutionary."

OLIVIA: "He says he's a king, and that he came into the world to tell the truth, so his kingdom is certainly in this world, but it's the kingdom of truth, which is to say, justice, and the opposite of exploitation, deception, what people do to other people."

FELIPE: "There's another interpretation of the Gospel which is purely individualistic and leaves out the great deceptions that humanity suffers, and is concerned only with the private life of each person. And it doesn't notice the fact that the world is divided between bosses and workers."

GUSTAVO: "That religion is opium, because it keeps you asleep or seeing illusions, ghosts."

RAUL: "On the contrary, Christ's mission was to bring truth to the earth. He says to Pilate: 'I am a king, and my political order is to put an end to lying and exploitation; my followers are all those who struggle for the transformation of the world.'"

"And why does he say: 'All those who obey the truth'? As though the truth was in charge. Or is the truth a law?"

I: "Truth is the law of love. Jesus brought that truth; it's the incarnation of the commandment of love. That's why he says to Pilate: 'I was born for this.' And at the Supper he said: 'I am the truth.'"

"He says all those who obey the truth listen to what he says. That's funny. It seems it ought to be the opposite: those who listen to what he says obey. Obey the commandment of love."

"But it's not like that. He himself is the commandment of love. And he doesn't say that those who listen to him, the Christians, live in accordance

with love; he says the opposite, that those who live in accordance with love, those are his followers.”

“He tells Pilate that he's king and that he came to tell what the truth is. It would seem there's nothing in common between being king and telling what the truth is. But they'll have a lot in common, his kingdom and the truth.”

I: “The organization of a just society, that's the truth of humanity. Christ came to tell what the truth is, what justice is; and that justice will be his reign.”

Pilate said to him: “And what is truth?” And he went out again to speak with the Jews.

“He asked and turned around to leave. He didn't wait for the answer.”

“Like those who say: ‘And what's the revolution?’ They're all alike, all stupid.”

“He asked what was truth, and he turned his back on truth, because if he'd faced the truth, he'd have had to resign that position he had, which was something like the American ambassador.”

“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” And they all cried: “Not that one! Release Barabbas!” And Barabbas was a bandit.

I: “Luke adds that this Barabbas was in jail because of a rebellion. He was clearly a guerrilla fighter. And Pilate clearly understands that Jesus’ crime is the same kind. He proposes to exchange one subversive for another. At that time the government called guerrilla fighters bandits, just like now. That's the way we must understand the word ‘criminal’ as applied to Jesus. Even the Roman historian Tacitus, writing a few years later, says in his *History of Rome* that Jesus was a man that Pontius Pilate condemned as a ‘criminal.’”

“But the Jewish upper class considers Jesus more subversive than the other one; they prefer to see Barabbas released.”

“That Barabbas couldn't have had very clear ideas. And the upper class sees that Jesus’ revolution is quite complete.”

“If he'd said his revolution was inward or that he was coming to have rich and poor alike converted, not a damned thing would have happened to him.”

I: “Like that Protestant biblical magazine that's around here, very attractive (they won't ban it, it's not subversive). It says the world is full of injustice, and that the Bible is against injustice, which is true; but afterwards it says the boss must check whether he's unjust toward the worker, and the worker whether he's unjust toward the boss.”

MANUEL (laughing): “How is Jesus going to say the worker is unjust toward the boss?”

“They think the work belongs to the boss, as in the time of Jesus Christ they thought the person belonged to the master; if the slave escaped, it was unfair, because he was stealing himself from his owner.”

MANUEL: “Oh, they had them all counted.”

Then Pilate ordered Jesus to be whipped. On his head the soldiers placed a crown of thorns, and they covered him with a purple mantle and they went up to him saying: “Long live the King of the Jews!” And they kept hitting him in the face.

“They were making fun of Jesus, right? And Jesus really was a king, except that he didn't wear king's clothes; he wore the clothes of the workers of that time.”

“He was a poor person's king.”

“He had come to be the king of the poor and humiliated of the earth, and when they put that rag on him to make fun of him, and they hit him, there he is in his true role as king of all the poor, the humiliated, the beaten, the tortured.”

“In Managua they cover them with a hood so they can't see who's beating them. Like they said to Christ: ‘Guess who beat you.’ The thorn business is now more refined, like the electric shock. In the North they take *campesinos* up in helicopters and drop them in the mountains.”

“He was a king, but not like those kings those guards knew, and that's why they thought it was funny to see him like that. He was the king of the people oppressed by the kings. He was *our* king.”

“But it seems that Pilate suspected he might be dangerous. Because the Gospel says he was afraid.”

The Jews said to him: “We have a law, and according to our law he must die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” When Pilate

heard this he was more afraid. He went back into the palace and asked Jesus: "Where are you from?"

PANCHO: "I think he thought maybe Jesus was divine, but what he was really afraid of was losing his job, because he was earning a pile of money there."

MANUEL: "Or maybe he thought he came from some other country."

LAUREANO: "I think instead that what he wanted to tell him was: So where you come from, you're a poor man, son of a carpenter. You're not a son of a millionaire or anything, so you're not a son of the upper class, then."

I: "The question might have had another purpose also. Galilee was a center of rebellion, and there was always armed struggle there. A few years before, when Jesus was a child, a great rebellion had been suppressed in Galilee, and two thousand revolutionaries had been crucified. And Jesus came from Galilee."

But Jesus gave him no answer.

"Simply because he knew his Father had ordered him to die."

"And if Pilate's question was intended to imply that he belonged to the zealots, maybe Jesus preferred to be silent rather than speak against the zealots."

Then Pilate said to him: "You do not answer me? Don't you know I have the authority to crucify you and I have the authority to set you free?" Jesus answered him: "You would have no authority over me if God had not given it to you; that's why the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin than you."

OLIVIA: "That one that handed him over for money. He was guiltier because he knew him. Like who knows Ernesto better than we do? If we hand him over we're guiltier than the guy that's going to kill him."

PANCHO: "And he tells Pilate that he wouldn't have any power if it hadn't been given to him from above. So he means he'd been given power from above."

ALEJANDRO: "But he was unjust. You can give power from above, but it's just, not unjust."

RAUL: “Christ tells him power comes to him from above, when Pilate was thinking it was coming from Rome.”

ALEJANDRO: “But it turns out that God is love, and he wasn't acting according to love.”

RAUL: “To say that power comes from God is the same as saying it comes from the people. And you can't use it just as you please. Jesus tells him he's sinned, making it clear that he's not the biggest sinner.”

ALEJANDRO: “Well, he was one more cog in the machinery, in a system that was opposed to love. The system is the greatest sinner.”

“He was coming to establish a society of brothers and sisters that didn't then exist, and it doesn't exist now. Pilate, by killing him, is much to blame, like any colonel that orders an innocent person killed. But the others, who knew the message, it was the messiah they were rejecting; it was because of hatred of change.”

I: “Reactionaries often refer to this phrase, ‘all authority comes from God.’ This is like saying that it comes from the people, as Raul says. All authority, but not all abuse of authority. The revolution, when it comes, is also an authority. It's the authentic authority of the people as opposed to the false authority of those who abuse power. Since the revolution is an authority, it comes from God.”

The chief priests said to him: “We have no other king but Caesar.”

FELIPE: “It's the chief priests, not the people. Like now, it's a little group of sons-of-bitches who are part of the system. The ones that loved Jesus didn't have any voice or vote at that time; and they don't have one now.”

I: “The upper class was also oppressed by Rome, and they didn't really like Caesar. But they preferred to accept foreign control as long as they could kill the liberation, which is Jesus; they prefer dictatorship to the messianic kingdom. The Caesar was Tiberius, the cruelest emperor that Rome ever had.”

And so Pilate turned him over to them to be crucified, and they took him away.

“Christ's death is really the death of the opposition, the way members of the opposition die now; he was opposed to a system and he died the way so many dissidents die now, tortured and massacred.”

“Like many others in Vietnam, or Nicaragua, he was accused of being a communist, an agitator, a dangerous person, a revolutionary leader who was stirring up the people.”

“And Pilate washes his hands: ‘Me not know nothin’, me no mix in your politics. Me innocent.’”

I: “Crucifixion was the Roman punishment for political crimes. Jesus had repeatedly spoken of his death on the cross; and what he was saying was that he was going to be condemned by the Romans as a subversive. He knew it had to be that way.”

“And the chief priests went off to their homes to eat their Passover meal without ‘sin.’”

Someone asked Julio Ramon: “And you, why don't you say something?”

He answered: “The people don't need these religious commentaries; they need action.”

His brother ALEJANDRO: “It's stupid to talk like that; you don't talk because you're timid. We've not been talking about religion but about everything. I've learned a lot in today's commentary. There are very important things I didn't know before, and now I know.”

106.

The Crucifixion

(Luke 23:26–49)

Good Friday. In church, at three in the afternoon, in suffocating heat. We are in the worst of the dry season, which is called “summer” here. No breeze blows, not a leaf moves, and the lake is as still as though it were a stone. All around us all the vegetation is dry or withered. Farther off the fields appear black, charred, because they've been burned for future crops, when the rains come. In the air there's a burnt smell.

> *When they were taking Jesus to crucify him, they grabbed a man from Cyrene called Simon, who was coming from the fields, and they made him pick up the cross and carry it behind Jesus*.

FRANCISCO: “A privilege for that man.”

“Would he take it as a privilege? He's coming from the fields, he's coming from work, and he's going home to lunch. It was three in the afternoon. And they force him to carry the cross.”

“Of course he didn't want to do it. But even though he grumbled and everything, it was a privilege.”

“He was out working, he wasn't coming from a party. He was coming from the fields.”

“Yes, it says there clearly that he was coming from the fields, he was coming from work.”

“Simon of Cyrene, he may have been going to do some errand, maybe, and he saw all that there and he said to himself: I'll just have a look.”

“Here we see the situation of injustice that there was then; somebody that has nothing to do with it has to lug the cross. The same injustice as now, but it's clearer here: a guy that's coming from working in the fields has to lug the cross of Jesus.”

I said that in history there have been many cases like that. Many people who have been obliged to help Jesus with his cross, who have had that privilege, as Francisco says.

“It seems to me he was a very peaceful man, and it's easier to take advantage of those. If he was strong and somewhat timid, well they imposed on him to lug it.”

“I see a relationship between the worker carrying his cross and that other farm worker that was called to help him. I don't know if he'd go because he had to, by force, or if he'd go willingly. But you might suppose he'd go willingly, if he had any knowledge of what Jesus was, of his message. Anyway, it's a very symbolic picture: the worker and the farmer accompanying him, taking part in his tragedy.”

I said that in the Gospel According to Saint Mark there is the added detail that this Simon was the father “of Alexander and of Rufus,” two names that must have been known to the first Christian community.

“But they forced him. It says: ‘They made him pick up the cross.’ It's like, for example, when some guards are taking you away—right—and they say to another man, come help us handle this shitty prisoner. They're forcing you to help them because if you don't help them they screw you.”

“But it was also because they saw he was lower class. If he'd been Mr. High and Mighty they wouldn't call him; they'd call someone else, someone as screwed as the one they were taking away. That's why they screwed that guy.”

“An arbitrary action. Like so many that they've been committing against the *campesinos* for so long.”

Many people were following him and many women who were crying and shouting with sorrow.

“Because here his people were really following him. It wasn't only the Pharisees and the priests; the people were there, who had always followed him.”

“It was only then that the people could get in touch with him, because around Pilate they wouldn't let the people get close; the people were kept outside. But now they're really with him. And it says ‘they were shouting’; I bet they were shouting at the guards: ‘sons of bitches’ or something like that, and maybe Simon, who was in the field, realized they were going to kill Jesus and he came, and maybe gave a shout and a guard said: ‘Hey, you, you carry the cross.’ Maybe that's the way it was.”

I: “At least, given the circumstances of Nicaragua, that's the way it would be here, right?”

“They give you a whack.”

“There were a lot of people who loved him. And especially the women. He was their liberator and in his passion they were faithful to him.”

I: “Those women were revolutionaries, and that's why they got involved and supported him. And among them was his mother, the most revolutionary of them all. It was she who had said during her pregnancy: ‘The powerful will be toppled from their thrones and the humble will be exalted, the hungry will be filled with good things and the rich will be left without a thing.’ She was a revolutionary and a communist before Jesus was born. Those ideas she had received from the prophets of the Bible. And those ideas Jesus sucked in with her milk. She shaped him, she influenced him, she contributed greatly to his being what he was and to his meeting the end that he did.”

“But the devotions to Mary give a different image of her, an image that wouldn't please her at all.”

“Because those songs they have written to her are quite horrible. She surely wouldn't like them.”

“They give the image of a very rich and very powerful lady who gives alms to poor children.”

“They seem to be written for a First Lady, for Lady Somoza.”

> *Turning to them Jesus said: “Women of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, weep for yourselves and your children. Because a day will come when it will be said: ‘Happy are the mothers without children, the women who did not give birth or breast to suck.’”*

MARIITA: “Well, those women were people that understood him, that is, they understood his sacrifice, and afterwards they also were going to be

ready to surrender, they and their children. So that the same thing would happen to them as happened to him. And maybe he himself said to himself: you weep and maybe you don't know you're going to suffer the same fate, and that they're going to kill you, too. Because there wasn't any justice. Everybody was in a bad way."

I: "What you say is very good, Mariita. He saw the state of oppression the world was in at that time, and that liberation wasn't easy, that cruelty was going to go on for a long time, and that there was going to have to be suffering for a long time. His death he has accepted, he himself sought it, as he said; and he thinks they shouldn't lament so much for him as for themselves and their children. Above all he is foreseeing the sufferings that the Romans were going to cause in Jerusalem. Many, many young people were going to rise up and they would be sentenced like Jesus. The Wailing Wall is still in existence, where Jews go to bewail the ruin of Jerusalem."

Because if they do all this with the green tree, what will they not do when it is dry?

LAUREANO: "He's making fun of them."

"Why do you say that he's making fun of them, Laureano?"

"He's making fun of them. He's telling them that they are dry and that he is green."

"He's distinguishing between two kinds of wood. He who has life in him, he has sap. He's a live tree. Others are just wood fit for a fire. But it's not that he's making fun of them. He's telling them that if they do this to the Son of God, what won't they do to the others, to the poor."

"That's what I think, he's comparing himself here with a green tree, which is stronger than a dry one; and if they're so unjust to him, well, after his death, what won't they do. And right here he's seeing the injustice they're doing to him and to the others: to him that they're killing, and to the guy beside him that's all tired out. The guy that comes exhausted from the fields, all pooped, they set him to carrying the cross, another injustice. So if at the same time that he's dying they're doing so much injustice, how will it be afterwards? It's something so common, committing injustice. It's something so easy to do."

I: "In modern times some people give it this interpretation: that he is saying that if this happens to him, who is a pacifist, what won't happen to

their children, the young people who were soon going to have recourse to violence against the Romans. ‘If they've condemned me, who have not borne arms, as a subversive, what won't they do to your children?’”

“It can also be that he's seeing that he was a tree with many branches. And that when he dies the branches are going to dry up and be easier to burn. Without a leader like him, the movement was going to be more easily destroyed.”

“Well, when the sap is dead the tree dries up.”

“Lots of people in Holy Week think only about the sufferings of Jesus, and they don't think about the sufferings of so many Christs, of millions of Christs that exist. And Jesus didn't want them to be wailing for him but to wail for the others that were going to suffer like him or worse than him.”

“Still right now there are people that are suffering for the same cause, and maybe they're suffering more than him, because at that time crucifixion was a kind of torture but you died right then and there; now they torture you but they leave you alive.”

I: “He's also saying that although he's not a zealot and has never borne arms, his death is for political reasons and they're sentencing him as a subversive. But for many centuries they have ignored the political nature of the death of Jesus.”

They also were taking two criminals to kill together with Jesus.

I: “Criminals, as we already know, are the zealots, the guerrilla fighters. We also know that the cross was the torture for subversives, and that's why Jesus was crucified with them. Many people who wear a cross on their chests don't know what that cross means. It's clear that he was not a guerrilla fighter, and that's why he makes that distinction between green wood and dry wood, but in the eyes of the authorities there was no distinction. Because *subversive* he certainly was.”

“I've heard that in some readings it's said, though it's not in the Bible, that those thieves stole things from well-off people to give to the poor, like the Tupamaro guerrillas in Uruguay.”

I: “These people were outside the law. To support themselves in the country maybe they had to attack private property and commit what is usually called theft. Those were the ‘thieves’ with whom they crucified

Jesus. But it should rather be said that he was crucified between two subversives."

> *And when they were crucifying him, Jesus said: "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing."*

"Nowadays the same thing happens with the torturers, because these people are machines; they don't even know why they're torturing a guy. They're torturing him; they're killing him; they don't know why they do it. So it could be that those people were also machines and they did it because it was their job."

"They were carrying out orders."

"I think that happens now also with the guards, because notice that now when there's a protest about the high price of milk or bread, the ones that are tossing the tear-gas bombs are the buck privates, the same exploited ones earning a few pennies, and it's for them that people are protesting the high price of milk or bread. Which means that they're doing things against their own selves."

"Through ignorance."

"That's why Jesus says: Forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing."

"I think that among those who crucified Jesus there were two groups: those who did know what they were doing, and those who didn't, like the buck privates, that you give an order to and they carry it out. If you don't understand that, maybe you'll understand a whack or a kick. It's been known that if you talk in private to one of them, when no boss is around, they're distressed to be carrying out that order. But there's others who know very well what they're doing. Christ was referring to those who were carrying out an order and not to the others, who didn't even go up to Golgotha."

"That was just like now; the soldiers and the Jews didn't know what they were doing, but the authorities did know. Because those guys knew that Jesus was against the powerful, and that he was the messiah who was going to liberate the people. The same thing now, the ones who persecute anyone who wants to make a change, they know very well why they're doing it. Somoza knows why he's doing it. The United States knows why it's doing it."

The people were looking. The leaders were making fun, saying: "He frees others, let him free himself, if he is really the Christ, the chosen of God."

"But he was coming to free others and not himself."

"They'd heard a lot about Jesus coming to liberate. The message about Jesus' liberation had been spread around. But they had no idea what that meant. For them the messiah was somebody that wouldn't let anybody screw him."

"They thought he had failed. The same thing has also been thought about revolutionaries that have died for the people: Che, Camilo Torres, Allende. And they don't know that that's their victory."

"If somebody tries to liberate himself, it's all right; he's not doing anything for other people. He stays inside himself. If somebody does try to do something for other people, I think he always has to be in danger of death. Whenever anybody tries to do something for others, he has delivered up his life."

And there was a sign over his head, written in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, which said: "This is the King of the Jews."

"It was to make fun of him, of his reign. And even now the enemies of the kingdom go on making fun of the kingdom and of people that are struggling for it."

I: "And it was also a Roman mockery for the whole Jewish nation. It's a sarcastic sign with which Pilate is telling them that their famous messiah is this poor shit. And that's why the Jewish authorities resented that sign, and they demanded that Pilate take it down, but he didn't."

"He has entered Jerusalem acclaimed as king. But he entered as a humble king, on a working donkey, not in a fancy automobile. And the new leaders now also come in poverty, preaching hard work and equality."

"They didn't expect that a king could come in on a donkey. On a donkey there ought to be a *campesino."*

"All that business about being received in Jerusalem like a leader, with a political rally in the streets, with banners (branches were then like banners), that must have upset the authorities a lot, and they decided to get rid of him.

But now they're furious when Pilate tells them their king is that thing: a subversive, outside the law."

I: "And Pilate is also explaining there what his crime was: a political crime. That means that we Christians must follow his example and be subversives. Now in Holy Week they're preaching a lot of sermons, but most of them won't be subversive."

"Right now on the radio you can hear a sermon on the Seven Last Words. But it's sponsored by Coca Cola."

We read that one of the "criminals" asks Jesus to remember him when he begins to reign. And Jesus says to him:

"I tell you truly that today you'll be with me in Paradise."

"It seems that at that time there were good criminals and bad criminals, right? Because the other one, who was also in trouble there, he didn't want to believe in him."

"And how was he going to believe him if he saw him there as a failure as a political leader?"

"The other one believed in him in spite of his failure."

"Among those who suffer with Jesus, some can believe in him and others don't."

"Maybe one of them thought that when Christ died, Christ's revolution died, and the other one maybe realized that when Christ was dying Christ's revolution was beginning and it was going to get bigger."

"He talks to Christ of a future kingdom, when he begins to reign. And Christ tells him that kingdom is already here. 'Today,' he tells him. That very afternoon. He welcomes him to that kingdom of love among all. Although on the other side of death."

I: "That change of words catches my attention. The man has talked to him about his kingdom, and Jesus talks to him about Paradise. In Genesis Paradise had been presented as something that there was at the beginning of humanity. But the intention of the biblical writer was not to present to us a past that we were to yearn for in vain (the Bible never looks backward) but to present to us a *utopia*, a future goal for humanity. The prophets speak of Paradise as something that would be in the future, and they identified it with the messianic era. And Christ says that Paradise (his kingdom) begins now, that afternoon. With his death."

Then Jesus cried out: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit."
And when he said this, he died.

I: "Jesus is here repeating a verse of a Psalm, adding the word 'Papa,' *Abba*. He tells the Father that he is returning to him the life that he has given him, and at the same time he is saying that he returns to him his spirit, which he has given him."

"And which has been transmitted to us."

"So that we too may give it up by giving up our lives for others."

"In each place where we live, we Christians must continue this redemption that Christ brought, because he didn't bring it completely. Because each one is born, first one, then another. And we're all deformed and we have to form ourselves. Jesus made the start so we could continue the work."

I: " 'Redeem' is a word from antiquity that means to ransom a captive by means of a price. It has often been said that Christ's death redeemed us, but it's not true; no death redeems from anything. His message redeemed or liberated us and his death made his message have an impact on the world."

"Jesus came to die for the poor, fulfilling a prophecy, to help the poor to free themselves, because by themselves the poor are cowards and fearful and timid, it seems to me. With his death he tried to give strength and bravery to the poor. But many, many poor people say: If Christ suffered like that, we too should suffer. But his message is that we must denounce the injustices of the rich, of power, of the police. He teaches us to fight for that same liberation that he died for as a man, as a brave man (he did not die a coward). If we're without love, conformists (I believe lack of love is conformity), there'll never be an end to all the poverty and exploitation there is in Nicaragua, and everywhere else. Even though I know just Nicaragua, they tell me that the calamity of exploitation is everywhere. I'm not a well-read woman, but reading the Gospels I always see the bravery of Jesus. Jesus is a brave man. Just as there are today so many men and women who are so brave, who aren't afraid to denounce injustice. Others are silent, and that is lack of love."

"Traditionally Holy Week is celebrated in Nicaragua with religious services, sermons, and processions. But we never stopped to think what was the cause of the death of Jesus, never. And that has made me think a lot. And I realize that Christ didn't give himself a Holy Week of devotions and

processions and religious ceremonies or any of that stuff. He died beaten and tortured, giving a message of liberation to us poor."

I: "He died while all Jerusalem was celebrating Holy Week. Jesus had the Passover supper with his disciples the day before, on Thursday, which was the date on which, as we've discovered in modern times, the Essenes celebrated it. But John says that Friday was the day when all Jerusalem celebrated Passover. So while he was dying on the Cross, in every house they were eating ritually the paschal lamb. Just as David Tejada was beaten to death on Good Friday, at the hour when they were making the Stations of the Cross on the streets of Managua. And his body was then thrown into the crater of the Masaya volcano."

"What I meant is that for me a true Holy Week is one in which we can see the fruits of Christ's liberation. There are some countries where the fruits can already be seen, even though they don't celebrate Good Friday or any other day."

"The Christianity that we had was very false, and every year we heard about the Passion, but we didn't understand it the way we now understand what Good Friday is. Now we're gradually understanding it and we're gradually having courage to stand up to things."

"He has come to free us from now on from selfishness, even before we free ourselves from all injustice and also from fear and also from death. Although they imprisoned him and they sentenced him and they killed him and they did everything to him, they really didn't do anything. He triumphed over death."

I: "We have often said here that the Father, *Abba*, is love. It was to love that Jesus delivered up the life he received from him and his spirit received from him and after his death he's alive; he is one with love. And we must do the same, triumph over death through love. One day the whole life of the earth is going to die, like these fields that are dry. The earth will be a dead planet in space, and in it will be buried all our bones. But all that part of humanity that, like Jesus, has delivered up its life to love will be alive in the universe—in love, which is the soul, the life of the universe. Like Jesus, who came out of his tomb. According to the Apocalypse, Christ is only the first-born of a resurrected humanity."

"We must then deliver ourselves up to death with love, filled with love."

"This is the command."

There is a prolonged silence, broken only by the lowing of the cows in the dry fields.

I: “Hasn't anyone anything else to say?”

107.

The Resurrection

(Matthew 28:1–10)

It is midnight on Holy Saturday. We are in the little church, which is now brightly lighted and crowded with people. Outside, the lake is very calm under the full moon. There has been a festival all evening, with music, drinking, and dancing under the mango trees, a festival organized by the Youth Club to celebrate the resurrection. *Campesinos* have come from all the islands, and also others not from around here who are working on the company estate. Some have got drunk. And there was even a fight, a few minutes before the Mass, in which Felix Mayorga got stabbed near the heart. We took care of him, and we have begun the liturgy of the Easter vigil. I went into the church wearing my vestments, carrying the Easter candle. After the Easter announcement, and some songs, I read the Gospel, and we commented on it.

> *When Saturday ended, at dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb*.

TOMAS PEÑA: “They got up early because they wanted to. And they were brave, because they weren't scared of the National Guardsmen that were on duty there.”

“It was women who went there, not men, because women are braver than men.”

OLIVIA: “Women are more loving. And love gives you a lot of strength. And when you love you're not afraid, you face up to anyone. The death of

Jesus, who died for love, had filled them with that courage, the courage of love. When you love, then there's courage; you're not afraid even of death.”

LAUREANO: “I don't see where's the courage of those women. They weren't running any risk by going there, the soldiers weren't attacking the women or doing a damned thing to them. Going to see Jesus and weeping for him there, why were they running any risk? They were weeping when he was being crucified, and they could have screwed them right there and they didn't. So now if they go there when he's already dead, what's going to happen to them?”

WILLIAM: “It takes a certain courage, man; it's like going now to lay flowers on the grave of a guerrilla fighter.”

I: “In those times nobody paid much attention to women. And that's why those women maybe didn't run any risk, as Laureano says. Their role was only to go and weep and then embalm the body of Jesus. A humble role. But this Gospel assigns them a more important role: they were witnesses to the resurrection.”

LAUREANO: “They have a very important role to play, as important as the men; but that doesn't mean they are braver or even more loving.”

MARIA: “They agreed to take care of Jesus’ body, and when they didn't find it there they said: They've stolen it; they've taken it away. Like what happens with the leaders, they kill them and they won't even give you the body.”

The angel said to the women: “Do not be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus, the one who was crucified. He is not here, he is risen, as he said. Come and see the place where they had put him.”

Someone from Deer Island: “It seems to me that maybe if they hadn't had faith in him they would have found him. As they did have faith in him that's why they didn't find him.”

I: “The important thing about this story is that they find an empty tomb. They were arriving to embalm a corpse and there wasn't any corpse.”

ESPERANZA: “I think the importance of that is that from then on every tomb in which a corpse is placed is empty. Even though a corpse has been buried in it, it has to be empty.”

I: “How's that? And the body that they'd placed in it?”

ESPERANZA: “It doesn't exist. There's no point in going to look for a body that's no longer anything, that's been resurrected, in that sense. And so, then, tombs are left empty. They were going to look for Jesus’ body, right? And they didn't find it.”

MARIA: “And afterwards he appears before them and shows them that he's alive.”

I: “And he goes on showing us that he's alive, us, gathered here twenty centuries later; and he's present in the midst of us.”

WILLIAM: “The important thing is that he's alive wherever there's community.”

> *Then the women went quickly from the tomb, with fear and at the same time with much joy; and they ran to bring the news to the disciples*.

From the back of the church came FELIX MAYORGA, his chest swathed in thick bandages, and he said: “They ran to bring the news to their friends. But that news wasn't just for them but so that the news could go afterwards from mouth to mouth. After many centuries it has reached as far as us in Solentiname. And later it will be heard by people not yet born.”

OLIVIA: “The news is not only about his resurrection but about ours. Because he is simply the first one resurrected. Nobody before had ever been resurrected. And that was done so that afterwards the rest of us could be resurrected.”

I: “That's why Olivia didn't wear mourning but wore a green dress when her daughter Olga was buried.”

FELIPE: “They struck him, they wounded him, they killed him, and they didn't accomplish anything with all that. We too, doing what he did, we triumph over death.”

“I'm also thinking they didn't leave a single trace of Che, and they sent his head, we're told, to the United States and his hands and feet they sent somewhere else, but it's clear that Che, just like Christ, has been resurrected in the hearts of everybody who wants a new world.”

I: “The revolution makes no sense unless there's a resurrection. If death isn't conquered, it does no good to conquer everything else in the world; the revolution has failed. That's why Saint Paul says the last enemy we'll have to conquer will be death. This is the consolation for the old people, for the

incurably ill who know they will never see the triumph of the revolution, also for the young people who are dying for it and won't see its triumph. And for all of humanity that has already died. And not only for humanity but for all living creatures, who have given up their bodies for it. The ultimate failure of humanity is the failure of all creation. That's why Saint Paul speaks of the birth pangs of all creatures, waiting for the liberation of our bodies. We are the conscience of nature, and with the death of humanity nature dies, in the sense that it could no longer be aware or be in love."

> *At this moment, Jesus appeared before them and greeted them. They then approached Jesus and adored him, embracing his feet, and he said to them: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that they must go to Galilee, and that they will find me there."*

ESPERANZA: "It's very much like the case of Che when he died in Bolivia. There those who knew him closest probably wept a lot for him, and he might have told them to go to Cuba, which he liberated; he was alive there, completely resurrected, because he struggled for Cuba, and how could he die? So he was resurrected for them in Cuba."

I: "He had probably told them: 'Go to Cuba, you'll see me there; to Cuba, and to the rest of the world.' So Christ said to them: 'Go to Galilee and to the rest of the world, there you will see me.' Also: 'Go to Solentiname, there you will see me.'"

BOSCO, Esperanza's husband: "And why were the women afraid if they've already seen Jesus Christ? Perhaps he's telling them not to be afraid of the police, of imperialism."

ESPERANZA: "The leader is dead, so they have an attack of nerves."

TERESITA: "And I think he's also telling them not to be afraid of death."

I: "Not to be afraid of imperialism or of death, it's the same thing."

LAUREANO: "What's important is for us to live resurrection here, right now, and for us not to believe, as many have believed, that this world doesn't count, that what counts is to go to heaven afterwards and all that nonsense."

"Like those Yankees they send us from the United States that go from house to house saying that you've got to be resigned, that poor people go right to heaven. That's what those Yankees that they send from the United States keep repeating."

OLIVIA: “And there's people that say you have to put up with things and live in poverty and sickness, and live with your kids naked, because that's the way Jesus lived, and be resigned so we'll get to heaven. We've been told that Christ's death is so we'll live resigned to misery. And I don't know why, because Christ died like a brave man, because that's why they killed him, for being so brave, always denouncing injustice.”

I: “It's certain that they've put Jesus resurrected in heaven, in another life, in the blue beyond, so that the earth will go right on being the same, and there'll still be injustice, and there'll still be poor people. But he rose to be here on earth: ‘He was dead and he goes to Galilee before you.’ And he's also here in Solentiname. And it's curious that now for the first time he calls the disciples brothers. Before, he used to say ‘My Father and your Father.’ Now, resurrected, he calls them brothers.”

ESPERANZA: “He's a guerrilla fighter. They've killed him because he fought for freedom. Everybody who goes to fight for freedom, to die for it and to rise again, they're all his brothers and sisters.”

BOSCO: “And the resurrection that Christ announces, isn't that going to be the progress of science, that will fix it so that one day humanity, in the perfect society, gets to triumph over death?”

MANUELITO: “How's that? Everybody old?”

LAUREANO: “That would be a bloody mess; you'd get tired of living.”

WILLIAM: “Resurrection is a new life, not the prolonging of this life. It's not what that rich bastard in California tried to do when he died and had himself frozen so he could later be revived. The son of a bitch had himself frozen like that, paying a lot of money, so that after a few centuries, when science can cure his illness, they'll thaw him out.”

MANUEL: “But he hasn't revived.”

WILLIAM: “Why, he's packed in ice! That bastard wants to be revived so he can go on screwing people.”

LAUREANO: “And it's possible he'll never be revived.”

WILLIAM: “Why should he be revived if he's a parasite, an insect? Even though society has progressed, or rather, because it has.”

I: “It's not a question of prolonging life, but the opposite, of giving it up, which is what the martyrs of freedom have done.”

OSCAR: “Maybe when the revolution triumphs God will reward the guy who's died for it, so he can rise again.”

LAUREANO: “But he *is* risen! Sandino's risen. Leonel Rugama's risen. Julio Buitrago's risen. All those people are risen, are living here with us.”

I: “Christ said that all the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man (that is, his commandment to love) and will rise from their tombs. Those who did good will rise and be alive; those who did evil will be condemned.”

BOSCO: “That guy that got frozen there, that one will really get screwed.”

FELIPE: “What I say, my personal opinion, is that if you rise again after you're dead, fine. What's important is to do what Christ commands, to live for the people; that's what's important for now. Let's forget about whether we're going to be revived. I think what we ought to do is do good. So if I rise again, good; if I don't, all right.”

OSCAR: “That's crossing from death to life. If you do something good here, you've triumphed over death.”

FELIPE: “Because otherwise, if we start thinking we're going to rise again, we're biased. I personally don't think about if I'm going to rise again.”

WILLIAM: “Christ says that to be revived you've got to let go of life. He gave the example of the seed that, to give fruit, has to die. It's not just getting shot; there's also a daily giving of life.”

ADAN: “That business about reviving after death, are they really going to rise from the tomb? That seems very queer, rising like that.”

OSCAR: “Or it may really be that you're not dead, maybe you're just resting [laughter]. Or rather, maybe you're not totally dead, your whole body.”

DONALD: “I don't think they're going to be revived in a very material form. What's going to rise up is the consciousness and the love that person had, and so we might say that person is rising from the tomb; it's not that the skeleton will get up and go walking around [laughter]. And society's going to be changed.”

I: “I think the revolution is going to be for the dead, too, for all of humanity that has died without being able to see the revolution. It would be unfair if the kingdom were only for that minority of those still alive, when a whole majority fought for it who died before it. And I believe humanity will be a single organism when it's united, and those who have become one with Christ, or rather with humanity, those who have fulfilled the commandment to love, are going to belong to that organism. It's not that anyone is going to be alive and isolated; they'll be in that body.”

OSCAR: “When the new society is created, it's going to be like seeing a bunch of bastards rise up out of the tombs.”

LAUREANO, whose family are Protestants: “The Protestants are the ones who raise those problems. If a shark eats you, is the shark going to vomit you up? If a tiger eats you, is the tiger going to vomit you up? That's a bunch of nonsense. If it was like that, poor Che could never rise again; hell, they sent his head one place and his hands somewhere else.”

JULIO MAIRENA (who has now come with his wife to be part of the commune): “It seems to me that if a guy dies fighting for the people and nobody follows his ideas, that one doesn't rise again. But if they follow his teachings, I think he's risen. Like what's happening now with the Nicaraguan songs, the old ones; they'd been forgotten, and Mejia Godoy finds them, and he plays them on the radio for all of Nicaragua, so now they're revived.”

I: “Christ says that when they hear his voice the dead will rise. He means that when his message of love and revolution is heard by all humanity, and the new society is created, all those who formerly lived that message are going to rise again in that society, like those old songs, as Julio says, that nobody remembered except Don Rafael Arana. And that one that got frozen, he'll be unfrozen so that they can judge him.”

WILLIAM: “Maybe he'll be left frozen forever, suffering the cold.”

I: “Porfirio Miranda says that the kingdom hasn't come because people haven't believed in it. The news that the kingdom is coming will make the kingdom come. And when there's justice throughout the earth there will come the resurrection of the dead. The error of twenty centuries of Christianity has been to believe that we can obtain the kingdom of heaven without changing the world. And that's why we're still without the kingdom of heaven. Christ had said before that the kingdom wouldn't come until the news was announced to the whole world. And now, after he is risen, he will tell them to go throughout the world and announce the news to all the earth.”

The journalist PEDRO RAFAEL GUTIERREZ, who has come back from Managua to spend a few days: “I've just read also in the Gospels another account of the resurrection, where it says that Thomas put his hand in. They say there are no miracles now, and just a little while ago I felt very strange, with Felix Mayorga, I swear to you I had a deep impression. Because just as Saint Thomas put his fingers into the Master, I put mine into Felix

Mayorga, in the same place, on the left side. And I said afterwards: How wonderful! It's too bad it was due to such a painful event; it's a lesson for no human being ever again to raise a hand against a brother or sister. But for me it was an unforgettable experience, to have felt the beating of the heart of Felix Mayorga, resuscitated. We had seen him fall to the ground, and his relatives weeping over him, and suddenly here he is, commenting on the Bible."

MAGDA asks: "So the resurrection is here and now and not in the other world?"

I: "Christ says that it's now. When Martha says to him, 'I know that they will be resurrected on the last day' (and that's what Christians continue to think), he corrects her, saying, 'I am the resurrection.' Christ talks a lot about 'eternal life,' but we now know that that does not mean a life beyond this world but a life without death. Many modern theologians say there is no other world than this one. But Marxism, on the other hand, maintains that the world is eternal. About the resurrection we know almost nothing, and we mustn't talk a lot about it; Christ himself refused to say much. I simply believe, with Esperanza, that the tombs of all those who have loved their fellow human beings are empty."

108.

Jesus at the Shore of the Lake

(John 21:1–13 and 20–25)

Simon Peter said to them: “I'm going fishing.” They said to him: “We're going with you.”

LAUREANO: “It seems those disciples, with the death of Jesus, went back to their old habits.”

DONALD: “It seems they decided, since he was dead, there was nothing to do. They weren't going to continue his mission.”

BOSCO: “It must have been the first time they went fishing since the death of Jesus.”

WILLIAM: “Maybe what Peter told them was: ‘I'm going back to what I was before, a fisherman.’ And the others said they were going to do the same.”

ALEJANDRO: “And they were wrong, shitting it all up, because they were going to look stupid.”

TOMAS: “It seems that night they were jinxed, because when they pulled the net in it was all empty.”

“Haven't you caught anything, boys?” They answered: “Not a thing.” Then Jesus said: “Cast your net to the right and you'll catch something.”

ESPERANZA: “It seems to me this way: Jesus wanted to make a comparison with the way it was before they found him resurrected. They felt everything they'd do was going to be in vain. But with him resurrected,

what they'd do would be positive. When he joins them abundance comes. This is the picture. The fact is that without him they didn't catch a thing and with him they did. That pointed out to them the mission they were going to have in the world. And that they ought to change jobs, because they could do more important things, with Jesus there, than just be catching *mojarras*. For Jesus had told Peter he was going to be a fisher of people, not fish."

LAUREANO: "It seems here it was a sign they needed to know him, because it was only after they caught the fish that they knew who Jesus was."

TERESITA: "It was lack of faith, because they needed his physical presence; they felt lost without Jesus. That's why he had to appear before them several times so they'd know they weren't living without him."

OSCAR: "It seems too he was being angry with them, telling them to cast the net on the other side. He was trying to tell them that people shouldn't live working only for themselves. They had to work for other people too, to free the others. That's what he meant by that stuff about the other side. I've not explained it well, but it's something like that."

BOSCO: "It looks like if there hadn't been that miraculous catch they'd have gone on fishing."

OLIVIA: "He was punishing them, making them catch nothing all night long. It was very funny they hadn't caught anything through the whole night, because good fishermen like they were, how could they spend the whole night without catching a thing? But they didn't. So then he appeared before them so they could see they were stupid."

> *Then the disciple that Jesus loved said to Peter: "It's the Lord!" The minute Simon Peter heard it was the Lord he put on his clothes (because he'd taken them off) and he jumped into the water*.

"Why was it they hadn't recognized him?"

"Maybe because he was far away."

I: "Not very far, because he could talk to them. It seems it was dawn and still dark. But I think even at night you can recognize a friend that speaks to you."

LAUREANO: "If Felipe speaks to me from the shore I know it's Felipe. They must have been confused."

OLIVIA: “It looks like they were in great sorrow because of Jesus’ death. When you're bowed down like that with suffering, well then, you're not interested if somebody calls to you.”

FELIPE: “It's not every day you see somebody resurrected just like that.”

I: “In the other accounts of the appearances of the risen Jesus, he always has to tell them: It's me. It seems those apparitions aren't the way we can see Felipe there, or like we can hear him from the coast. They were mysterious apparitions, and you needed faith to recognize this.”

WILLIAM: “The people in Emmaus recognized him by his way of breaking bread. Here John recognized him because of their catch of fish. Peter heard it was him, and kerplunk! in he went.”

“He put on his clothes to jump into the water?”

“Maybe it was so he wouldn't be naked or in his underwear in front of the resurrected Jesus.”

I: “Maybe so, but they were used to getting wet and going around with wet clothes, just as you too get wet all the time and dry off and get wet again.”

DOÑA NATALIA: “As Peter had behaved badly toward him, maybe that's why he jumped into the water, to get there first.”

TOMAS: “With clothes there's more danger of drowning, but he didn't care about that.”

When they reached land, they found a fire with a fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them: “Bring some of the fishes you've just caught.”

FELIPE: “That Jesus was a good cook.”

TOMAS: “Well, at least he was trying.”

GLORIA: “He was making breakfast for them.”

TOÑO: “He'd also scaled and cleaned the fish himself, right?”

OLIVIA: “He's showing love that way, with that roast fish, because that's the way he was cooking it. Suppose it *was* easy to cook. What's important is the love he's cooking it with. He knows those men are tired to death and they've spent all night soaking wet. They need breakfast. That's what the fish is for.”

Simon Peter got on the boat and dragged the net to the beach filled with big fishes, a hundred and fifty-three, and even though there were

so many the net didn't break. Then Jesus said to them: "Come to breakfast."

"It must have been an old net if they were surprised it didn't break."

TOMAS, a great fisherman: "A hundred and fifty-three fishes, that's a lot of fish."

I: "*Guapotes* and *mojarras*. We have a book on the fish in Lake Nicaragua which says that the *guapotes* and *mojarras* in this lake also exist in the Sea of Galilee."

TOÑO: "Jesus was probably roasting them a big *guapote."*

MARCELINO: "The fishes are all of us, and the net is unity, which doesn't break."

OLIVIA: "Love is so important and so beautiful. He was showing them his love after his resurrection, making them that breakfast with a father's love, or a brother's, or a comrade's."

ALEJANDRO, her son: "It seems like that would take away a little of the previous mystery, doing such a common thing (though maybe not so common after all) as giving them something to eat, so natural. But the mystery is also where he'd got that fish. But he treats the mystery very simply, because he doesn't appear before them to say anything except 'Eat,' so as to feed them."

I: "And so they could see that he was still one of them."

ALEJANDRO: "That's it: to take away the mystery."

OLIVIA: "He wants to go on being identified with them, and with us. He hadn't done that before, before he died. He'd done the multiplication of the fishes and the loaves. But it was only after he was resurrected that he roasted those fishes. It was to make us see that death hadn't separated us from him. Because he appears and he begins to roast the fish, and he calls them to come to breakfast. He's not like we might say a fleshless spirit concerned only about spiritual things. Here he's concerned about their breakfast, the resurrected Jesus, and he tells them to come to breakfast."

ALEJANDRO: "That's a very good image, because he appears there at work. And he's shown like a real person, material, not like something theoretical or an idea. And about that earlier business, about the net on the right side, that's easy to explain. When you're busy at work here, they always say: Cast on this side, cast on this side. The ones that come up to watch, right? Because they're always guessing where there's more pebbles,

where it's deeper and all that. And then maybe Jesus saw it was deeper on that side and then he told them to cast on that side. So I see him there in the little bay. Well, you've got to believe he did it so they could get all those fishes."

And none of the disciples dared to ask who he was because they knew he was the Lord.

I: "My attention has always been caught by that little phrase in the Gospel."

LAUREANO: "They went back to fishing because they were fishermen and so now that Jesus appears before them they don't even want to ask. It seems they're ashamed. They probably didn't even think he'd be resurrected."

BOSCO: "Maybe that business about not daring to ask is because they weren't sure. I mean at the beginning, they weren't sure it was him. But they didn't say who are you for fear he'd tell them they had no faith."

TOMAS: "It seems like they knew it was him but they weren't so sure it was him. They knew through faith it was him."

I: "That shows that his presence was a mysterious presence."

ALEJANDRO: "It's very puzzling because it says they didn't *dare* to ask him, as if they'd wanted to ask him. But it says they didn't because they knew it was him. They knew it but they *wanted* to ask."

LAUREANO: "As I see it, it's like those guys still didn't believe he'd been resurrected. So it must have been that they saw him but they thought it was a fake or that they were dreaming. That's what they must have thought."

I: "But besides they probably weren't seeing a person of flesh and blood like us. That's clear from that little phrase in the Gospel."

BOSCO: "That must have been a mysterious apparition, as Ernesto says."

TERESITA: "Asking would have meant having doubts. They made an act of faith. Besides, they were feeling it was him, they were knowing it was him."

TOMAS: "He'd already lit the way."

I: "And it could be that they don't dare to ask him about his resurrection, they don't dare to go deep into that mystery. It's enough for them to know he's resurrected."

TOMAS: "You needed faith to be able to recognize him. Suppose he appears here among us—right?—in these meetings. But be careful: if we

have faith we'll see him too. Before that they'd started to fish, but I don't think he blamed them for starting to fish. They had a right to fish to get food."

I: "He doesn't blame them, but after they saw him they didn't go on fishing; they devoted themselves to spreading this message, which has been written down, and which we now have in our hands on these islands."

DONALD: "It seems to me that maybe they went fishing because they were sad, looking for relief, to forget, in the fishing, in the lake."

GOYO, a timid little man, almost in a whisper: "Jesus has appeared now, near another lake."

Then Jesus came near, took the bread in his hands, and gave it to them, and he did the same with the fish.

"Wasn't he so near to them?"

"The Eucharist?"

I: "The Eucharist."

TOMAS: "They were really celebrating the bread of the Mass."

WILLIAM: "The communion was with bread and roast fish, which symbolize the abundance of the goods of the earth, and water. The water of the lake."

I: "Earlier they'd had a Eucharist at a supper, and now they have another Eucharist at a breakfast, with bread and fish and water, as William says."

WILLIAM: "A common and ordinary meal, then. But a meal that had that meaning, the sharing of all the goods of the earth, the communion of those who have everything in common in a community. That's the sign he makes there with the bread when he divides it and shares it. And the same way he divides the fishes in equal parts, the one he'd prepared for them and the others they caught and added afterwards. It's to make us see that everything ought to be shared like that, the whole economy of the country."

JULIO: "He was doing it as an example, feeding them, because that's the way they must share the bread or work so that everybody can eat. It seems to me that he began like that with that example, with his apostles, so that they (who are us now) would go on sharing the bread like he did."

I: "That's what he had taught them when he multiplied the loaves at the Last Supper."

JULIO: “That's why he said his followers should go on doing that work and remembering him: You do the same.”

I: “At the time of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, which was beside this same lake, the Gospel says these same words: Jesus took in his hands the loaves and the fishes. Afterwards at the Last Supper he uses the same words again: He took in his hands the bread, and he took the wine, and he gave it to his disciples. In the appearance to the disciples at Emmaus, Jesus again took in his hands the bread and gave it to them, and it wasn't till then that they recognized him. And here the Gospel again uses those same words: He took in his hands the bread and gave it to them and he did the same with the fishes. It seems that the Gospel wants to make us see the same thing is being repeated, the Eucharist.”

DOÑA NATALIA: “It's the same thing that happens with us, who are seeing all this right in front of us, what you're explaining to us, even though we're without faith. That's the way it probably happened with them, who were knowing what Jesus told them, and it seems even so they had little faith, just like us, just the way we are.”

ESPERANZA: “That was a sign, it seems to me, that sharing that he was doing of the bread and the fishes, something humble. But they already knew him by means of that. Now, if somebody goes around with good things, good books, for example, but real books, not false ones, well that's how we get to know him. That's the way he identified himself through the fishes, through the bread, humbly. Those disciples liked to eat fish, and they knew he was the one who gave it to them.”

I: “It's just as Esperanza says. He becomes known to them through that communion of humble but necessary things. That time, with the sharing of the loaves and the fishes, he had everyone take part in a common meal, a communion, you might say. At the Last Supper he made them see that that communion of their little community was his body. And now again he has that communion with them in the bread and fish. This is interesting, because it shows that the Eucharist doesn't have to be only bread and wine at the altar. Now, we may say, we're going to have a Eucharist with turtle, in our meeting hut, right?”

“That's it.”

I: “It's a communion given to us by the boys of the commune who went to hunt for it last night in the shallow waters of La Salvadora, and the girls

who are cooking it now. Well, I'd say that we're also having a Eucharist with that turtle, not just the one at the altar."

DOÑA NATALIA: "In that breakfast he was giving them a communion that he wanted to be for everybody."

ELVIS, her son: "Doña Olivia said a while back that Jesus had identified with the people, right?"

OLIVIA: "I believe this Gospel is very much needed throughout Nicaragua. If this Gospel was preached and discussed everywhere, there'd be an end to that ridiculous Holy Week they have. Instead of those traditional ceremonies and prayers that they commemorate the death of Jesus with, everybody'd go into action to see what we can do for each other, and we'd take into account the injustice that people haven't eaten in this Holy Week. They once used to tell us we shouldn't run or even take a bath on these holy days, because Jesus was under the earth. Jesus came to wake us up. He died so he could come back afterwards to act more effectively."

> *This is the same disciple who states these things and who has written them. And we know he tells the truth. There are also many other things that Jesus did, that if they were written down one by one, I believe there would not be room in all the world for the books that would be written. Amen.*

I: "These are the last verses of the last chapter of the Gospel According to Saint John, which was the last Gospel to be written. Now it's not he but other people who are talking. This was added when John's narrative began to spread in the early communities and they were commenting on it as we are commenting on it now. It appears that this is the commentary of people who had known Jesus at first hand and they say that his testimony is true. We also believe in Jesus because we believe in the testimony of those who knew John, who knew Jesus. That's why we are here holding this book in our hands, the story that through many hands has reached us, on the shore of this lake."

BOSCO: "It seems very exaggerated to say that not even in the whole world would there be room for the books that would be written."

ALEJANDRO: "It seems that in those times it was very hard to get paper, and books were scarce. That's why many things were left unwritten."

"Books were rolled up. Big rolls."

I: “And what would they be, those things that were left unwritten?”

LAUREANO: “Gosh, if they didn't write them, you can't tell what it was. The only thing you know is what got written.”

TERESITA: “Since everything Jesus did was good, you can never get to the end of telling all the things he did.”

ADAN: “Among the things Jesus did that aren't written could have been his contacts with the guerrilla fighters.”

WILLIAM: “It seems to me it also refers to the great changes he made in people and in the world, and that he goes on making and will go on making through his followers.”

I: “And all that he did and said, and it's told here, we comment on it and we can go on commenting on it for a long time. And we could say that these commentaries never end.”

ALEJANDRO: “And they even get written, and they could never finish being written.”

I: “We're going to publish that book, of the commentaries that have been made, a selection of them. And those commentaries of Alejandro, Donald, Marcelino, Laureano, Oscar, Elvis, Olivia, Ivan, Bosco, Esperanza, Tomas, Felipe, William, Gloria, Goyo, Adan, Pancho, Natalia, Manuel, Teresita, Julio, Myriam, Rebeca, maybe will lead others in other communities also to comment on the Gospel. It can also be said that our lives are included in what Jesus did and goes on doing, together with the lives of many, many others throughout the world, and all that would never manage to get written and if it did get written it would fill the entire world with books. Anything more? Then, if you're willing, we'll stop here, because the boys want to have time to play their baseball game.”

GOYO: “We can say that the love he had for us was so great that you couldn't get it into all the books in the world.”

DONALD: “It's because what he did is infinite, man, like nature.”

FELIPE: “And the revolution too never ends, because there's always something to revolutionize more. It's limitless.”

GOYO: “And there's a lot of ways of revolutionizing the revolution.”

OLIVIA: “Whenever anybody's struggling for liberation they're carrying out the Gospel, and that's why Jesus’ Gospel never ends. And that's why there wouldn't be room for it on the earth if it was written.”

I: “The teaching of Christ is infinite, like nature, as Donald says. And the teaching of Christ is the revolution itself. And we can say that the

revolution is nature itself.”

DONALD: “It's really an endless labor. And the revolution has no end because there can always be a greater liberation.”

GOYO: “And that's what keeps leading us to God, then.”

I: “Until we reach God completely.”

WILLIAM: “And the kingdom of God comes into being on the earth.”

FELIPE: “Then there'll be an end to the Gospel.”

I: “Which means in Greek the good news of the kingdom.”

DONALD: “But there won't be an end to it, because even if this humanity ends, the work of Christ will continue on even beyond death.”

I: “And the Gospel ends with a final word, Amen, which is a Hebrew word that means a very strong ‘Yes,’ the assent of a community. It's the community that was commenting on it and that has said ‘Yes.’ This is our response to the word of Jesus, to the one who, as John has said at the beginning of his Gospel, is the word that existed from the beginning.”

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