



Adolfo Pérez Esquivel's Acceptance Speech, on the occasion of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, December 10, 1980

*(Translation)*

Your Majesty, Mr. President of the Nobel Committee, Committee Members, Ladies and Gentlemen:

With humility I stand before you to receive the high distinction that the Nobel Committee and the Parliament grant to those who have committed their lives on behalf of peace and to the pursuit of justice and solidarity among nations.

I would like to receive this award in the name of the people of Latin America and especially in the name of the poorest and smallest of my brothers and sisters, who are the most beloved children of God. I receive it in the name of my indigenous brothers and sisters, the peasants, workers, and young people, in the name of the thousands of members of religious orders and of men and women of goodwill, who renounce privileges to share the life and way of the poor, and who struggle to build a new society.

For a man like myself, *a small voice for those who have no voice*, who struggles so that the *cry of the people* may be heard in all its power, for one without any special identity except as a *veritable Latin American man* and as a Christian, - this is, without any doubt, the highest honour that I can receive: to be considered *a servant of peace*.

I come from a continent that lives between anguish and hope, where my own history is being written. I am convinced that the gospel power of nonviolence presents a choice that opens up for us a challenge of new and radical perspectives. It is an option which gives priority to the essential Christian value: *the dignity of the human being*; the sacred, transcendent and irrevocable dignity that belongs to the human being by reason of being a child of God and a brother or sister in Christ, and therefore, our own brother and sister.

In these long years of struggle for our organisation, the Service for Peace and Justice in Latin America, we have shared the path together with the poorest and most necessitous.

We have not much to say but much to share in order to achieve by nonviolent struggle the abolition of injustice and the attainment of a more just and humane society for all.

It is walking together with our brothers and sisters, those who are persecuted, who hunger and thirst for justice, who suffer oppression, who live in anguish by the prospect of war, who suffer aggressive violence or see regularly postponed the attainment of their elemental rights.



It is for all these that I am here today.

Would that my voice could have the strength of voice of the humble, a voice that denounces injustice and proclaims hope in God and humanity. This is the hope of all human beings who long to live in harmony in common with all persons as brothers and sisters and as children of God.

Latin America is a continent young and vital, which was described by Pope Paul VI as the "Continent of Hope".

To understand this is to value this reality and be called to share in its destiny. It means to achieve a profound identity with the people who are the protagonists in this historic process. It means being ready to redeem pain and suffering with love in the way that Jesus taught.

When we see the world our people inhabit, we see it as an affront to God in which millions of our children, youths, adults, and the elderly live under the mark of under-development.

The institutionalised violence, misery and oppression generate a dual reality, fruit of the political and economic systems that create injustice, sanctifying a social order that benefits only a few: the rich becomes ever richer at the expense of the poor who becomes ever poorer.

Confronting that reality - like the Catholic bishops at Puebla, like the Christians committed to the struggle for human rights, like all persons of goodwill - I want to share the anguish on the suffering face of the Latin American man or woman in whom we see the suffering face of Christ, our Lord, questioning us.

As I speak to you, I see before my eyes the vivid images of my brothers and sisters:

– faces of the workers and peasants living at sub-human levels, whose rights to organise are severely limited; – faces of children who suffer from malnutrition; – of young people who see their hopes frustrated; – of the marginal urban poor; – of our indigenous people; – of the mothers searching for their missing sons and daughters; – of the disappeared, many of them mere children; – of thousands of exiles; – of the people who clamour for liberty and justice of all.

In spite of so much suffering and pain, I live in hope because I feel that Latin America is a continent on the rise. Its liberation may be delayed but never denied.

We live in hope because, like St. Paul, we believe that love never dies. Human beings in the historical process have created enclaves of love with their active practice of



solidarity throughout the world, with the goal of the full liberation of humanity.

For me it is essential to have the inner peace and serenity of prayer in order to listen to the silence of God, which speaks to us in our personal life and the history of our times, of the power of love.

Because of this faith in Christ and humankind, we must apply our humble efforts to build a more just and humane world. I want to affirm emphatically: such a world is possible.

To create this new society we must reach out our hands, fraternally, without hatred and rancour, for reconciliation and peace, with unfaltering determination in the defense of truth and justice.

We know we cannot plant seeds with closed fists. To sow we must open our hands.

I want to thank all of you and the Nobel Committee for this high distinction given the humble people of Latin America. I am deeply moved and even more committed to redouble my efforts in the struggle for peace and justice.

We know that peace is only possible when it is the fruit of justice. True peace is a profound transformation by means of the force of nonviolence that is the power of love.

I would like to tell you that, thanks to the support and understanding of my wife and children even in the hardest and most difficult moments of this struggle, I could continue this work together with my brothers and sisters of Latin America. With my family's love, silence and solidarity they have always helped to give me strength and courage to serve my brothers and sisters.

Invoking the strength of Christ, our Lord, I would like to share with you, with my people, and with the world what He has taught us in the Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the poor in spirit; – theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the gentle; – they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they who mourn; – they shall be comforted. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; – they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful; – they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart; – they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers; – they shall be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; – theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of falsehoods against you for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for great will be your reward in heaven. In the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.

(Matthew 5, 1-12)



Receive my deep gratitude and my wish for peace and well-being.

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