

THE SON OF MAN, LIGHT OF PILGRIMS ON EARTH

Feast of the Transfiguration
August 6, 1978

Readings:

Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14

II Pedro 1:16-19

Matthew 17:1-9

My dear sisters and brothers.

Esteemed Auxiliary Bishop, Vicar-General and representative of the Diocese of Santa Ana, Canons, Priests and Faithful of this community that today beneath the shadow of the Divine Savior have come to celebrate the feast of the Transfiguration.

It seems to me that never before has the nation been more beautiful than today when she is bathed in the light of the sun of the One who is transfigured --- for as a result of the transfiguration the face of Christ becomes like the sun. We remember first of all the primary origin of this beautiful landscape of our country. The sin of humanity submitted nature to slavery, selfishness and passions but in Christ we find the hope of restoration. Indeed, the firstborn and the hope of our restoration enables us to see as never before the marvels of our volcanoes, lakes, rivers, plains and seas. If it is true that in Christ all men and women, to whom inanimate nature is intimately bound and united, desire and await salvation, then this fact explains the great faith of our people and of the multitudes that since yesterday afternoon began to fill our capital and, with prayer and hope, have raised up their voices to the heights of the Divine Savior. In you, Lord, we find the true meaning of our life, for you guide our history. You are the Word through whom God created all things and in whom God redeemed the enslaved world.

There is a phrase in today's Liturgy of the Word that gives us the key to be able to understand this mystery of Christ. The key to history and nature and our hopes is found in the phrase, *the Son of Man*. When the vision of the transfiguration was concluded, Jesus said to his apostles: *Do not tell the vision to anyone until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead* (1). The first reading explains this mysterious phrase. As I comment on the Word of God on the occasion of the most beautiful celebration of our country, I find in the Son of Man and the splendor of his glory the light that enlightens this pilgrim people on earth. Let us listen to this transfigured One with all the logic of a God who knows better than we. The command that each one of us should carry as the message of the transfiguration is the following: *this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him* (2).

The Son of Man in the fullness of his glory

The first thing that I want to explain is the meaning of this phrase the *Son of Man* who appeared in the fullness of his glory. The reading from the book of Daniel (3) that was proclaimed this morning tells us that Jesus took this title from this book and often applied it to himself in the gospels --- he calls himself the Son of Man.

This title has, first of all, an individual meaning so there would be nothing strange for someone to call himself the Son of Man, the son of humanity, the son of Adam, the son of a natural human being. But besides the fact that all people could call themselves the son of man or the son of humanity, the Bible applies this title to Jesus with a sense of eminence. The prophet, who is speaking here, calls God the Son of Man. The Son of Man is an eminent person, a unique mysterious individual. Thus this name carries with it a collective meaning that is explained by Daniel in today's reading (4): the holy people of the Most High and the eschatological panorama of a judgment in which many seats have been prepared for the children of the Most High God who will come to them on the clouds (5). This is the people that has been chosen by God. The Son of God is surrounded by men and women who have been faithful in following the Lord. God will judge history and crown the holy ones with glory. Christ also announces that those who follow him will be seated on the seats of the tribes of Israel and will judge the people of these tribes and all the inhabitants of the world (6). Thus, the Son of Man takes on a collective meaning. Christ is the head, the exemplary model of the whole redeemed race. Christ is with this people who have been saved.

Therefore, the phrase, the Son of Man, in its individual and collective meaning has a profound messianic significance. Jesus uses this phrase when he speaks about his glory --- when he is before the tribunal of priests and announces that they will see the Son of Man descend on the clouds with all the majesty of God (7). On other occasions he says that the Son of Man will be humbled like the Servant of Yahweh, for this Servant has accepted the burden of the sins of humanity in order that all people might be redeemed (8). This is a people that have been humbled and yet glorified because they have identified themselves with the head: Jesus Christ. Thus we can say that Christ is the Son of Man and all of Christianity is joined with him, the head of this body.

The hope of redemption and glorification --- this is meaning of this morning when we celebrate the transfiguration of our divine Savior. When Jesus presents himself as the Son of Man on top of Mount Tabor, he is giving us a glimpse of the answer to our prayers: hope and the desire for happiness, joy and salvation --- all of which men and women carry in their hearts. When this morning and yesterday afternoon on the beautiful throne of the traditional *bajada* (descent) we saw the figure of the transfigured Christ, we are reminded of the fact that this Christ is not only present here today, on August 6th, 1978, but is also the same Christ who was at prayer during the night and was surrounded by prophets and the leaders of the People of God --- the future hierarchy that was initiated with Peter, James and John. Indeed this same Christ is now the whole Church and all people who desire to love and follow him, all those who are transfigured with him and who are filled with light and experience on this earth that light which will one day shine brightly in eternity.

The Son of Man, light of those on pilgrimage on this earth

The second reading corresponds to my second thought. The Son of Man is light for the people who are on pilgrimage on this earth. I am glad to see the people come from the different communities of the Archdiocese and from beyond. You come here in the light of Christ and are filled with hope and faith. It seems that Saint Peter has written his superb second letter for us, the people of El Salvador. In the passage that was proclaimed today (9) we are exhorted to remain faithful to the teaching given to us, a teaching based on the power and the glory of Christ and on the living witness of the apostles, who saw with their own eyes the Redeemer's transfiguration --- a witness that confirms the witness of the prophets. There

on Mount Tabor is found all the Old Testament in Moses and Elijah and all the New Testament in Peter, James and John (10). They confront the clever fables, the teachings of human beings and the false redemptions that human beings promise so that they can trust in them. Almost poetically, Saint Peter says that this faith is like a lamp burning in the night that will light up the darkness until the morning star arises (11). It is the night of our history; it is the journey of our time; it is these difficult hours such as our land is undergoing which seem like a night without escape --- until the sun of the transfiguration brings daylight and hope to the Christian people, enlightening our way. Let us be faithful to this light.

Dear sisters and brothers, the Church knows it is God's lamp, a light taken from the glowing face of Christ to enlighten human lives, the lives of all people, the complications and problems that human beings create in their history. The Church feels obliged to speak, to enlighten like the lamp in the night. The Church feels compelled to light up the darkness. Therefore within this glorious framework of August 6th I want to announce that as we did last year on this same date, we are going to publish a Pastoral Letter¹ which will deal with two problems that our people confront: popular organizations and the problem --- or perhaps it is better to say --- the temptation to violence.

This letter will be published very soon and I want to make this letter available to the communities and villages and families and to every corner of our Archdiocese so that you are able to grasp the ideas of this lamp, this light of faith that enlightens all people who debate the true realities of our people. This Pastoral Letter presents two problems and as an appendix to this Letter² we have included much material about the teachings of Sacred Scripture and the magisterium of the Pope which will enable everyone to reflect upon these realities.

This Letter is focused on the identity and the objective of the Church, namely, evangelization. The Church is a lamp that has to give light, and therefore it must involve itself in tangible realities and thus be able to enlighten the pilgrim people who walk on this earth. This concern of the Church does not mean that she leaves her own sphere but rather that she perseveres in her difficult obligation of shedding light on concrete matters. Out of this concern, the Church defends the right of association and she promotes the vigorous activity of raising consciousness and of organizing among the poor in order to bring about peace and justice. The Church, because of her commitment to the gospel, supports the just objectives that the popular organizations likewise seek, and she points out the injustices and the instances of violence that the people's organizations may commit. Therefore, the Church cannot be identified with any organization, not even with those that call themselves Christian. The Church is not the organization and the organization is not the Church.

If Christians have matured in their faith and their political vocation, then concerns of faith cannot be simply identified with a specific political concern. Still less can the Church and the organization be identified as one and the same reality. No one can say that within a certain organization all the Christian demands of the faith will be developed. Not every Christian has a political vocation, and political activism is not the only activity that implies a concern for justice. There are also other ways to translate one's faith into work for justice and the common good.

One cannot insist that the Church or its ecclesial symbols become instruments of political activity. To be a good political activist one need not be a Christian, but Christians involved in political activity have an obligation to profess their faith in Christ and to use methods that

are congruent with their faith. If a conflict arises in this area between loyalty to the faith and loyalty to the organization, genuine Christians must choose faith and demonstrate that their struggle for justice is for the justice of God's kingdom and no other.

Priests and lay people, called to work together with the hierarchy, may naturally feel more sympathy for one party or organization than for another, working as they do in a type of evangelization incarnated in the country's tangible realities. But if they realize that the efficacy of the Church's mission depends on their being faithful to their own identity, then the first goal of their pastoral work will be to encourage and guide others in faith and in justice. They will leave the specific tasks that arise from ordinary political action to those who are expert in evaluating and managing them.

My sisters and brothers, we also deal with the problem of violence and it is sad to have to present today this spectacle of violence and this picture of bloodshed and desolation and anguish when we celebrate the feast of the Divine Savior of the world. For this reason we reaffirm before the Divine Savior of the world and before the face of the earth that we believe in the fruitfulness of peace and that the ideal Christian says NO to violence and YES to peace.

At the same time with the traditional morality of the Church we analyze the problem of violence. This is not easy to do because there are nuances that distinguish institutionalized violence, that is, that form of violence that has become very common and oppresses the majority of people. We also speak about the repressive violence of the State that attempts to maintain peace through armed force --- this is not true peace. Then we speak about revolutionary violence, that which the Pope called the *temptation of subversion* (12) when an oppressed people attempt to achieve the freedom to which they are called. There is also a spontaneous violence, such as when an abuse of justice arises in an institution, in a factory, and spontaneously people become aggressive --- thus a violence arises that is not organized but one that spontaneously responds to the nature of the situation. Finally, there is also a violence that is better called legitimate defense and that occurs when innocent persons are abused and they defend their life or possessions.

We make a moral judgment about these distinct forms of violence and we also make an analysis of the situation of our nation. As we analyze the causes of so much violence that leads to desolation and death we say that they are the same as the actual misery that encompasses our nation. The intransigence of some and the violent repression of others enflames the present conflict. But this violence always seems to be justified and that is even more dangerous. As long as the roots of violence persist, there will always remain an obligation to work for the establishment of the roots from which peace can arise. Peace has to be a work of justice (13).

We repudiate organized violence that has taken on a certain mystique of guerrilla warfare and terrorism and has enthroned violence as the only source of justice. This simply continues the spiral of violence and cannot be the solution to our problems.

I exhort you to use the aggressive abilities that God has given you to work on behalf of justice and peace. On this morning of the transfiguration it is interesting, my sisters and brothers, to look at the different persons who surround Jesus (14). They are all violent persons: Moses killed one of the Egyptians when he saw this person oppress his people in Egypt (15); Elijah ran his sword through the false prophets who abused the dignity of the true

God (16); Peter drew his sword when Jesus was about to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane (17); Jesus called James and John *the sons of thunder* (18) --- impetuous individuals --- because one day they asked Jesus to rain down fire on a people who had refused to receive Jesus and his disciples (19) --- but with all of this, they are faithful to Jesus. Aggressiveness is an instinct that was given to them by God but often this instinct is not enlightened (Jesus spoke to James and John and rebuked them and told them that the Son of Man had not come to destroy but to save people (20). But Jesus does not mutilate this power of men and women, rather he reorients this power with Christian power. The Church also calls upon people and tells them (21): Christians are peaceful and are not embarrassed by this fact. They are not simply pacifists but are able to engage in battle, but they opt for peace over war. Know that sudden and violent changes in structures would be ineffective and not in conformity with the dignity of people.

Therefore in our Pastoral Letter we exhort the different forces to organize themselves in an honorable struggle and use legitimate means of pressure. Never place your trust in violence or allow your just demands to be poisoned with violent ideologies. My sisters and brothers, the Church is a lamp in the night and she not only illuminates the social problems of the actual moment but she also illuminates the intimacy of matrimony, the intimacy of the source of life. The Church is against abortion and all forms of immorality. The Church is against all those vices and everything that is darkness and that leads men and women along paths of perdition. The lamp of the transfigured Christ wants to transfigure our people.

Listen to Him

Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I conclude by reminding you of God's command this morning: *Ipsam audite! (Listen to him!)* (22). Jesus also taught violence, but the violence of redemption --- that violence that he endured when he offered his body as a victim of violence in order to pay the debt for our crimes and sin. This Jesus speaks to us this morning and I want to interpret his words and offer a prayer to the transfigured Christ: *Lord, look at the sad reality that our nation is offering to you. Come again, mysterious Savior, and may this hope that we place in you become for us the peace that we have lost. There is no justice in our present situation.*

Thus, Jesus returns again and I dare to interpret his word this morning. In the first place he speaks to the people, to those who bear the cross of tribulation and he says: *Become worthy of the love of God.* The fact that the Church is poor does not mean that the Church is with the poor. The poor have a right to remind the Church when she demands respect for her rights but forgets her obligations. The poor also have a right to develop themselves, to become educated and seek a better life. Poor people are not those who lack material goods but those who possess a spirit that is willing to receive everything from God.

I also want to tell those who have an abundance of material possessions to learn how to share. This morning, our divine Redeemer anticipates the morning of the final judgment and is giving us an opportunity: *Whatever you did for one of these least sisters and brothers of mine, you did for me* (23). God does not ask for alms but demands social justice.

I also want to speak to all those who have achieved a degree of leadership among the people --- professionals or those who have organizing abilities and have important roles, all those whom we might call leaders even though they might be leaders in some humble area of

our country: My sisters and brothers, in the name of Jesus, help to clarify our present reality and search for solutions. Do not try to run from your vocation as leader. Know that you have received this gift from God not to hide it or seek comfort in your family and seek well-being. Today more than ever the nation needs your intelligence.

And to the political parties and grassroots organization, cooperatives and popular organizations --- this morning the Lord wants to inspire you with the mystique of his divine transfiguration so that with this organizing power you might also transfigure our reality with authentic liberation and not with the ineffective mystique and methods of violence. Keep in mind the event that is occurring this morning: this is a people who believe and hope in God. Let us hold in high esteem the religious values of our people and do not give importance to outside forces that do not recognize the marvels such as those that occur here in El Salvador. Let us know how to find in the soul of our own people the power that Christ has given to them in order that they might achieve their redemption.

To those who bear in their hands or in their consciences the burden of bloodshed, the burden of outrages and of the victimized, innocent or guilty, but still victimized in their human dignity, I say: *be converted*. You cannot find God on those paths of torture and outrage. God is found on the path of justice, conversion and truth.

To those who have received the awesome charge of governing, in the name of Jesus Christ, I recall how urgent are just laws and solutions for the majority who have vital problems of livelihood, land and wages. The good of all, the common good, has to be an impetus for you, as charity is for a Christian. Be mindful of the right to participate that all aspire to --- for everyone can contribute something to the nation's common good. Now more than ever a strong authority is needed, not to seek a mechanical or despotic unity, but rather as a moral force based on freedom and on the responsibility of all so that all forces can come together, in spite of their different viewpoints and even of their opposition to the nation's good. Give people the opportunity to organize, to repeal unjust laws. Grant amnesty to those who have broken laws that are not for the common good. Stop intimidating the people, in particular the rural population. Set free or arraign in court those who have disappeared after arrest or those who are jailed unjustly. Give those who have been expelled or kept from returning to the country for political reasons --- grant them the opportunity to return to the country once again.

Finally, my dear sisters and brothers, the voice of Christ becomes more intimate and speaks to us who form his Church: *I have distinguished well, for this people of God will one day be the holy people of the Most High*. Do not identify yourselves with the people of this world whom the Church is called to help. You are a people who have a most intimate relationship with the Lord --- we might almost say you are clothed in Christ. We are his bishops, his priests, his religious, his catechists, the communities that are nourished by the Word of God. Try to follow intimately the Lord! For us more than anyone else, the Word of Christ becomes an imperative for us to be the true Church that, like a lamp, illuminates the night. My sisters and brothers, do not confuse the Church with other lights so that you might always be that pure light of Christ, a Christ as transparent as the transfigured Christ. In a word, my beloved sisters and brothers, people of El Salvador and other lands, we are all the People of God. In the midst of the people of El Salvador let us become a People of God that is truly the Church of the Divine Saviour. So be it.

¹ *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*, Third pastoral letter of Mons. Oscar A. Romero, archbishop of San Salvador, and first of Mons. Arturo Rivera Damas, bishop of Santiago de María (6 August 1978).

² *Anexos a la Carta Pastoral "La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares"*, Pastoral Commission, Archdiocese of San Salvador, October 1978.

Marginal References (1) Mt 17,9: (2) Mt 17,5: (3) Dn 7,13: (4) Dn 7,10: (5) Dn 7,13: (6) Mt 19,28: (7) Mk 14,62: (8) Mk 8,31: (9) 2P 1,16-19: (10) 2P 1,16: (11) 2P 1,19: (12) PP 30: (13) Is 32,17: (14) Mt 17,1.3: (15) Ex 2,11-12: (16) 1K 18,40: (17) Jn 18,10: (18) Mk 3,17: (19) Lk 9,54: (20) Lk 9,55-56: (21) M 2,15: (22) Mt 17,5: (23) Mt 25,40.