

ADVENT, TIME OF JOYFUL HOPE

First Sunday of Advent
December 3, 1978

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

My beloved sisters and brothers and radio audience.

Today is the Church's New Year. A new Liturgical Year begins today, the first Sunday of Advent. As I speak with you at the beginning of this Liturgical Year, I have the impression that we are beginning a new cycle in the school of liturgy. At this time I invite all of you who are participating in this reflection to take on the role of a student who is about to begin a new course. How great is the enthusiasm of the students who take another step forward in their formation, be it their professional formation in the university or the small child who now enters second grade! Our enthusiasm is a sign of the joy that we experience as we begin this new course.

I like the comment of the person who told me that Mass here in the Cathedral and my words as a teacher of the faith are like the university. There are many people here who not only study their religion in an intellectual manner but also practice and live this religion in their everyday life. Indeed, the liturgy is not simply intellectual faith but a lived reality.

Speaking about the Liturgical Year the Council states: *Within the cycle of a year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord* (1). These are the broad outlines of the paths that we are going to travel as we prepare for Christmas, as we reflect on the great mystery of the Incarnation and as we await the Redeemer who will come to save this world.

Since today we begin a new course we also open a new book of the eternal Book of the Gospel. According to the way in which the Biblical readings are ordered, this year we will use as our text the gospel of Saint Mark. Keep this in mind so that in your homes you can also study this year's liturgical text: the gospel of Saint Mark.

I am glad to have before me the testimony of one who at the beginning of the second century reminded the people about the history of Christ. I am referring to a priest named Papias who cites and refers to an even more ancient text that describes the manner in which Saint Mark wrote his gospel. He says that he was told: *When Saint Mark acted as Peter's interpreter, he carefully wrote down what Peter proclaimed with regard to the things that Jesus said and did but Mark did not do this in an ordered way*¹. Papias then says: *Peter was accustomed to adapt his teaching to the needs of the time but did not put any order to the oracles of the Lord*². Last Sunday I spoke to you about the homily in which the Pope proclaimed: *I am the successor of Peter and I bring with me the whole history of the Popes but I am the Bishop of Rome today and I will try to enlighten the realities of today.*

This is the meaning of the homily! The homily is the eternal Word that is applied to the realities of today. According to the testimony of the second century this is what Saint Peter did. He did not proclaim the life of Christ in some orderly manner but preached the teachings of Christ according to the needs of the moment. This explains how Mark, Peter's secretary, was able to write a gospel that Papias said *was not written in an orderly way but rather should be seen as a reminiscence*. It was not written in the way that one would write a biography. Thus, the gospel should not be read as a biography of Christ but must be seen as the way in which an individual lived life. This is very typical in the gospel of Mark. More than preaching Jesus is present, Jesus makes himself present. He is the light and does not need to speak. It is sufficient that he is present as the light that does not speak, that he is present as the light that illuminates reality.

Thus this year we have as our text the example of Saint Peter and so we do not proclaim the gospel and Christ as an ordered theory but as a lived event which enlightens the reality of El Salvador, the realities of the week that has just passed and that was filled with events and injustices as well as some very beautiful moments. My sisters and brothers, we will try to imitate Saint Peter here and therefore it should not be viewed as wrong that the Bishop uses the chair of the gospel to preach the gospel. But in preaching the gospel I do not speak about a non-incarnated gospel but one that is incarnated and that enlightens the realities of our time. Who among you does not long for the Word of the gospel that enlightens the death of our beloved brother, Father Ernesto Barrera? I must speak such a word! Who among you does not long for a word about the men from Holland and England who were abducted in our country? I must also speak about this! This does not mean that I am putting aside the gospel in order to meddle in politics. Rather, like Saint Peter, I am bringing the gospel to the realities that I have just mentioned in order to illuminate these realities.

The title for my homily today is *Advent, the time of joyful hope*. Based on today's Biblical readings I have the opportunity to preach about the sentiments that Christians should have during this time of Advent. This is why the Church preaches --- to provide a Christian orientation and to Christianize the life of those persons who listen to the Word. I do not presume to do anything else for I am simply a preacher of the Word of God and I know that the success of this preaching lies in you: in the good will of those who receive the message of God and attempt to give life to this Word. I also try to live these four weeks of Advent, this time of preparation for the Nativity, with an attitude of joyful hope and at the same time try to clothe myself in the virtues that the Word of God highlights: first, poverty and hunger for God; second, vigilance and faith; third, Christian presence and action in the world.

This is Advent! This is the message of joyful hope that is communicated to us during Advent! As you can see, the Word of the Gospel brings us joy and optimism without separating us from the difficult realities in which we find ourselves. In the heart of the Christian there is joy, there is hope and there is strength. Nothing can take away this joyful waiting for the Lord.

Poverty and hunger for God

Advent is a call to clothe ourselves in a spirit of poverty and hunger for God! Advent, the time of preparation for the Nativity, is a time of conversion. Those who enter this process of conversion are looking for God. But how are people going to look for God if they do not realize that they have a need for God. People do not desire freedom unless they realize that they are enchained or enslaved to some situation. People do not desire liberation unless they

realize they are oppressed. Therefore, poverty is the following: When we speak of the Church of the poor, we are not using Marxist dialectic, as though there were another church of the rich. What we are saying is that Christ, inspired by the Spirit of God, declared: *The Lord has sent me to proclaim glad tidings to the poor* --- words of the Bible --- *so that to hear him one must become poor* (2). The poverty of Advent resides in a hunger for God. The poor hunger and the hunger that Advent leads us to is that which we heard in the first reading.

The first reading from the book of Isaiah describes the social and religious situation of the Jews who returned from exile. When they arrived in Jerusalem they found the Temple abandoned which caused them to feel an emptiness. They were unable to find what had been and what ought to be a human community: warmth and happiness --- these were lacking. The pious individuals among those who returned from exile looked at this loneliness, the abandoned streets, the destruction and ruin that resulted from the foreign invasion – they looked at themselves and the survivors who were returning from exile. They appeared pessimistic and sinful. They had not learned the lesson that God had punished them because of their sins!

Read the whole of chapter sixty-three and sixty-four where we find the beautiful prayers -- and today's reading contains only a small fragment of this prayer: *You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your way, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants the tribes of your heritage* (3) --- what follows is a prayer that is very proper for the liturgy of Advent: *Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountain quaking before you* (4). This is the meaning of hunger for God. The person who feels the emptiness of hunger for God is the opposite of the self-sufficient person. In this sense, rich means the proud, rich means even the poor who have no property but who think they need nothing, not even God. This is the wealth that is abominable in God's eyes, what the humble but forceful Virgin speaks of: *The rich he has sent away empty* --- those who think they have everything -- *The hungry he has filled with good things* (5) --- those who have need of God.

My sisters and brothers, this is the first virtue of Advent. Indeed this virtue is very appropriate as we prepare for Christmas and therefore I beg you, let us try to empty ourselves of self-sufficiency. We have to await the gift of Christmas not from the richness of the world but from the only one who is rich: God who comes to fill the emptiness that cannot be filled by all the gifts of Christmas when the heart is filled with pride and vanity. Let us examine our hearts to see if we have these sentiments of the poor, to see if we are truly honoring the Church of the poor --- the poor who hunger for God, the poor who feel that without God everything is empty and impure. Listen to the psalmist: *We are all sinful and our justice is like a soiled cloth. We are like withered foliage and our sins carry us away like the wind.* We are so lacking in peace and yet there is too much bloodshed and crime and terror. When we speak about terrorism we not think about those pursued by people wearing uniforms but also refer to the terrorism inflicted by those in uniform which is also horrible and fills people with fear and kills people.

The second reading speaks to us about the motive for this hope, this hunger for God. Why do we wait for everything to come from God? Is this some kind of alienation, like the materialists who criticize us and say: *you do not struggle here on earth because you are waiting for everything to come from God?* No! We work here but we wait for everything to come from God because as Saint Paul has reminded us today, the Lord is faithful (6).

Everything comes from there, from above: life, intelligence, the qualities of persons who can make the country a better place, the intelligence that many desire to destroy and oppress, the intelligence that many want to use in order to enrich themselves and who have no interest in becoming instruments of God who contribute to the joy and happiness of others. Therefore the first virtue of this season of Advent is an attitude of waiting for everything to come from God but at the same time to have an attitude of dedicated work and of making our contribution in the way that human beings must do.

Vigilance and faith

The second virtue that appears in today's Biblical readings is that which Christ speaks to us about in the Gospel of Saint Mark. With reverence we bow before this new book that we read this year because we are presented with a passage that we heard at the beginning of the Gospel and that presents us with a synthesis of what will be proclaimed throughout the year. The gospel of Saint Mark is the shortest gospel but the only necessary Word is always brief: *Be watchful! Be alert! You do not know when the time will come. It is like a man traveling abroad. He leaves home and places his servants in charge, each with his work, and orders the gatekeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore! (7).* This is what I say to all of you: *Watch!* This is the key word of Advent: *Watch!* Advent: here I am going to explain the meaning of this beautiful word.

We call these weeks of preparation for the feast of the Nativity the time of Advent because the spirit of this season is awaiting that which will come, the one who will come. In today's reading Saint Paul tells us that we are preparing ourselves for this coming. (8) Advent reminds us of the first coming of Christ that was foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament who proclaimed that God would come in suffering and humility to save all people. Advent gathers up all the passages of the Old Testament and speaks directly to people's hunger for God and the hopes of the prophet: *Hopefully you will come, O Lord, to save your people.* Advent is a celebration of the coming of salvation that Jesus accomplished twenty centuries ago --- but this salvation is not history but is the future. Advent also signifies the second coming of Christ when he will come to judge, when he will begin his work.

Here in the Church we are working to make the Kingdom of God a reality. Everyone who struggles for justice, everyone who makes just claims in unjust surrounding is working for God's Kingdom, even though not a Christian. The Church does not comprise God's entire Kingdom; God's Kingdom goes beyond the Church's boundaries. The Church values everything that is in harmony with her struggle to set up God's Kingdom. A Church that tries to keep itself pure and uncontaminated would not be a Church of God's service to people. The authentic Church is one that does not mind conversing with prostitutes and publicans and sinners, as Christ did (9)--- and with Marxists and members of the Bloc and those of various political movements --- in order to bring them salvation's true message. Jesus came to save people in whatever situation he found them. Jesus wants to go out to all the crossroads, to the churches and to all Christians who await the final judgment, the consummation of history when the new heaven and the new earth will be created (10), where there will be no more injustices because the Lord will speak the final word.

Vigilance and faith, a vigilance that makes Christ who is operating in the new heaven present in the midst of this world. Christians are not people who wait for everything at some future time but Christians know that for twenty centuries Christ is at work in the midst of

humanity and if men and women accept Christ then they become these new women and men that society needs so that the world can be organized according to the heart of God.

The Council solemnly states that the restoration of the world has begun: *From the time that Christ came and brought the life of God that he inserted into the heart of history, the divine leaven has been placed in humanity. Blessed are those who find this divine gift and incorporate themselves into this gift.* It is for this reason, my sisters and brothers, that it is repugnant that a Church that tries to become present among the sins and errors of the present world should be criticized. Some want to keep the gospel so disembodied that it does not get involved at all in the world it must save. Christ is now in history. Christ is in the womb of the people. Christ is now bringing about the new heaven and the new earth (11) and the work of Advent is involved in this vigilance and faith: to discover the fact that Christ is continually coming. Advent is not just four weeks of preparation for Christmas. Advent is the Church's life. Advent is Christ's presence as he uses his preachers, his priests, his catechists, his Catholic schools, all the effort meant to bring about God's true reign, telling humanity that Isaiah's prophecy is now fulfilled: Emmanuel --- God-with-us! (12)

Within this framework of faith, an experience of the presence of Christ, I invite all of you who are participating in the Mass in this Cathedral and living as a Christian community to grow in your faith. Indeed, it is for this reason that we come to Mass and participate in the liturgy of the Church because the liturgy is nothing more than making present the mystery of Christ through the sacraments and the liturgical life. When the Church speaks about the Liturgical year she states: *In the course of the year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation and nativity to the ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord ... so that these are in some way made present for all time* (13). This is similar to our celebration of September 15th when we remember the events of 1821, a date which is part of our history. September 15th is nothing more than a remembrance. The liturgy, however, is not history and is not simply an act of remembering. The liturgy makes the whole mystery of Christ present. (14) For example, for us as Catholics, this time of Advent signifies that the Spirit of Christ, who came to save the world, wants to make present his hope and strength among the people of El Salvador. Today the Lord can save us because his saving mystery is made present among us and we simply need to learn how to take advantage of this presence.

Along the same lines, I wish to inform you that today I have promulgated a pastoral instruction on the sacraments³. It will be published but, as we begin this important time of Advent, I want to encourage you to benefit from these treasures we call the sacraments and of which Pope Paul VI said: *“One can never sufficiently stress the fact that evangelization does not consist only of the preaching and teaching of a doctrine. For evangelization must touch life: the natural life to which it gives a new meaning, thanks to the evangelical perspectives it reveals; and the supernatural life, which is not the negation but the purification and elevation of the natural life. This supernatural life finds its living expression in the seven Sacraments and in the admirable radiation of grace and holiness which they possess..... But if the sacraments are administered without the solid support of catechesis regarding these same Sacraments and a global catechesis, they could end up by losing their effectiveness to a great extent.”*(15) It is lamentable that we have accustomed our people to receive the sacraments without awareness.

Last Sunday – and I also lament this – the crowd of people bringing children for confirmation, more than two thousand children and it was a miracle no one was asphyxiated.

Someone remarked: “What will the day of judgment be like!” It was announced there would be no more confirmations. What I said was that we were no longer going to confirm small children unaware of what is happening. We will wait till they are 8 or older, can use their reason and understand a little, according to their abilities, that they are receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit..

What I am saying about confirmation also applies to baptism. It is true we have to baptize unconscious babies because “unless a man is born through water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (16); nevertheless the parents have an obligation, and the father commits himself to educate the child in the faith for the baptism to take place. If the father is not aware of this, then the baptism should not take place, for the sacraments should not be thrown away. They are sacraments of faith. And the same can be said of marriage. We are going to require greater rigor and oblige priests, as my predecessor Mons. Chavez did, to give pre-sacramental instructions to make the man more aware of what he is receiving, and not to treat marriage like an adventure for a few years and then to separate. Matrimony, Baptism and Confirmation are sacraments of faith and through them Christ Our Lord is present among us.

There is a beautiful passage written by a Protestant who became a Catholic. He wrote in his diary: *I was not a Catholic because of the sacraments. I believed that these were a human invention and thus hindered my direct relationship with Christ. I wanted to believe in Christ without the Church, but as I came to understand that the sacraments were actions of Christ I now give thanks to God that there is a Church that in the name of Christ accomplishes Christ's redemption.* This is the way in which the sacraments should be viewed. The Italian writer Manzoni wrote: *When I go to confession I do not know if the priest who pardons me has greater need than I of forgiveness. But at the same time I know that through his gestures and words: “I absolve you from your sins” it is not he but through him that God is forgiving me.*

Through the sacraments Christ is present in his Church and this is one of the spiritual matrixes of this time of Advent --- being vigilant for that day when the Lord will come. Perhaps it is better to say it this way: we discover that Christ lived among us but we did not know him. We discover that *what you did for one of these least sisters or brother of mine, you did for me* (17). How close is this Christ and how few have known him! Advent should admonish us to discover the face of Christ in each brother or sister that we greet, in each friend whose hand we shake, in each beggar who asks for bread, in each worker who wants to exercise the right to join a union, and in each *campesino* who looks for work in the coffee groves. Then it would not be possible to rob them, to cheat them, to deny them their rights. They are Christ, and whatever is done to them Christ will take as done to himself. This is what Advent is, namely, Christ living among us.

Christian presence and action in the world

Finally, my sisters and brothers, Advent is the presence of Christians in the world. Let us not forget that we celebrate the Incarnation. We celebrate the infinite loving gesture of God who so loved the world that he sent his own Word, his own Son to become man in the womb of Mary (18). Mary should be one of the central figures during Advent. Thanks to this pure woman, God found the womb of a holy woman where the Word of God could become man.

But notice, Christ became a man of his people and of his time. He lived as a Jew, he worked as a laborer of Nazareth, and since then he continues to become incarnate in

everyone. If many have distanced themselves from the Church, it is precisely because the Church has somewhat estranged itself from humanity. But a Church that can feel as its own all that is human and wants to incarnate the pain, the hope, the affliction of all who suffer and feel joy, such a Church will be the Christ who is loved and awaited, Christ present. And all of this depends on us.

We are the ones who are going to make Christ present. Here I refer to the second reading, the letter that Saint Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth. Those who are aware of the history of Paul's era know that the city of Corinth was a place of great licentiousness and the prostitutes were called "Corinthians" and the man who was going to rejoice and give free reign to his pleasure was identified with a very special verb: to corinth. This enables us to have some idea of the society to which Paul traveled to sow the seeds of Christianity. There a community is born! and therefore we should not be afraid to place ourselves in difficult situations. If our situation is more difficult than that of Corinth then we should work all the more to plant the seeds of the gospel in this society.

Saint Paul says to the Corinthians that he gives thanks to God and that he is mindful of them in his prayers: *... in Christ you were enriched in every way, with all discourse and all knowledge, as the testimony to Christ was confirmed among you, so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ* (19). It is like speaking to a group of young Christian men here in El Salvador and telling them that even though they see their companions involved in all forms of licentiousness, involved in prostitution and drugs, that they have found the fullness of happiness. Therefore they should continue to live that intimate happiness because the Lord has given them the fullness of happiness.

Advent is a call that tells us that, even though the world is depraved, people can live that intimate happiness that the Lord has given them and can give testimony to Christ in the midst of a corrupt society. Before a world that is in need of evident social transformation, how could we not ask Christians to incarnate the justice of Christianity and live this justice in their homes and their lives? How could we not ask Christians to be agents of change and become new women and men? Medellín states: *It would be useless to change structures if there were not new women and men to direct these structures.*(20) People with the same vices, with the same selfishness ... if structures are changed, if there is agrarian reform but if we are going to direct these reforms with the same selfish attitude then we will simply have a new group of wealthy people, new situations of abuse and new violators. It is not enough to simply change structures but rather we must ask if this reality is Christian, is this reality in accord with the mind of the Lord? Please understand that the change that the Church proclaims has its starting point in the heart of humankind --- new woman and men who know how to be a leaven for a new society.

Events of the week

Now, my sisters and brothers, in this role of making Christ present in society, an obligation that falls upon every Christian, a demand of Advent and Christmas, I take this time to review some of the events of the past week and place these in the light of the gospel. Thus it is also here that I say to you that our Church rejoices and suffers.

We rejoiced at the arrival of the Maryknoll priests, a congregation from the USA, who are going to work with us in the town of Dulce Nombre de María and San Francisco

Morazán, in the Department of Chalatenango. Another group from Maryknoll are going to work in the diocese of Santiago de María, in Ciudad Barrios.

Joy also to meet lively communities like that I met last Sunday in San Marcos when I went to confirm a group of young people who expressed their commitment and their desire to be faithful to Christ who gives them strength.

I am happy also for that church which is promoting a matrimonial apostolate and that, on Tuesday this week, I celebrated in the Church of El Carmen in the Colonia Roma a meeting for married people. Also to see that there was enthusiasm among seculars to become active pastoral agents. On Wednesday there was an evaluation of the work in El Paraíso and I was supposed to participate in this discussion but because of the death of Father Ernesto Barrera I was unable to be there.

I went to San Sebastián, Father Neto's parish, to express my grief to his orphaned family. And what a joy to meet, on the first Friday in the evening, with the members of a community where there is no pastor and where the people long for a pastor. Yet this community is very active and very Christian. They are not a group of revolutionaries but a group of Christians who care for one another with kindness and who try to follow what Father Barrera taught them. Father Barrera placed all his youthful priestly restlessness at the service of the parish of San Sebastián in Ciudad Delgado. Someone asked me: *Why did we not celebrate just one Mass for Father Neto as we did for Father Grande?* I said: *These are very serious matters and I did not want to make that decision but I invite all of you to celebrate a wonderful funeral Mass for him at the end of the novena.* Therefore, I invite everyone to participate next Saturday in the celebration that will take place in Father Neto's parish where we will offer prayers for his eternal rest.

I also participated in the graduation ceremonies of a group of young people in the center of Corte y Confección in Mercedes Umaña. Another parish group graduated in San Rafael Cedros.

In the evening I went to the parish of San Martín where the consecrated hosts had been stolen. The people there are a very Eucharistic people and I was able to see this for myself last night. They sang hymns and prayers and went to great lengths in making acts of atonement to the Lord. I congratulated the parish and assured them that this act of having lost the Blessed Sacrament would make them more devout.

In Plan del Pino, where one of those who died with Neto Barrera came from, Valentín, they are also celebrating the novena Mass at 7.00 pm. They told me in San Sebastián how that morning Fr Neto had set out with Valentín to look for wood to make desks for the parish school and never returned and that in the papers, which have thrown so much confusion on the event, there was no mention of the money Fr Neto was carrying to pay for the wood.

I want to unite myself to the pain of the family of the young man, José Ricardo Duran from Colonia Miramonte, who died in an automobile accident during the week. I remember him with kindness because he was the spiritual fruit of Father Alfonso Navarro who was assassinated last year. I also join myself to the suffering of the religious superior of the Sisters at the Colegio de la Sagrada Familia, Mother Carmen María Scaglietti, whose mother died in Costa Rica.

I also want to advise you that December 8th is the feast of the Immaculate Conception. This is a mystery that is celebrated in our communities with great joy. Not with the same joy that it is celebrated in Nicaragua even though this year perhaps the people of Nicaragua will

not experience the same joy as they have experienced in previous years when they celebrated this feast. Here in El Salvador, let us honor the Virgin in the best way possible. I have been asked by the Sisters in Citalá to announce that they are organizing processions in the different villages and all of this will culminate with a great celebration on December 8th.

I want to greet Father Plácido because today, the first Sunday of Advent, he celebrates ten years of work with *El Minuto de Dios*. This is a program that is broadcast on Channel 2 every Sunday at 9:00am. The other day he told me that I had entered into a disloyal competition with him but I believe that he will always have an audience. He does much good and I rejoice and give thank to God and greet this brother priest.

A very sad but also noble event occurred in the parish of Santa Lucia. There Father Astor allows his Church to be used by poor people who have no other place to wake their deceased family members. A funeral wake was being held there when two uniformed agents appeared on the scene and opened fire. The people gathered there complained and raised their objection but they were insulted. Father Astor became aware that these men belonged to the group of security forces at the Women's Prison and went to the commander who nobly listened to the complaint and promised to remove the offending persons from duty. A few days later the commander told Father Astor: *Father, everything has been taken care of and those men have been removed from duty*. I believe this is an example of light shining forth in the darkness. How wonderful that the abuses of the uniformed officials were properly punished! Those men are citizens and it is not permissible that because they have arms and then can act insolently against fellow citizens who are unarmed.

A married couple has asked me to remember their son, Oscar Roberto Orellana Martínez, who on January 3 will mark two years since he was captured in Colonia Guadacanal. Another *campesino*, Julián Pérez was captured with him and both of these men were twenty years old. Through declarations of other prisoners who have escaped we know that they are both still alive. In a letter that was written to me Oscar's father says: *My poor wife is gravely ill and only someone who is not a mother would not understand this. Are not two years of suffering and absence enough?* They ask the government to free these young men or to bring them before the courts. I take this opportunity to repeat the desire of the Church: A Christmas without political prisoners; a Christmas when we see peace restored to so many homes that have experienced the absence of children, spouses and brothers and sisters who have disappeared.

The Pope spoke about those who are persecuted because they are faithful to truth and justice⁴. He said that their sufferings were the same as Christ's. He spoke about situations that are very similar to the situations in our communities, even though, according to the reports in the newspaper, he was referring to those countries that are behind the Iron Curtain. You are able to see then that people do not simply act because of anticommunist feelings for many times it is precisely this anticommunism that is crueler than communism.

Through our newspapers we know the Minister of Foreign Affairs in El Salvador was received by the Pope⁵. We don't know the topic of their conversation, but I believe the Pope continued the line of thought that Paul VI began when he spoke with our ambassador, Don Prudencio Llach. John Paul II reminded the minister that it is necessary to give the Church freedom in El Salvador and to correct the evident injustices in our social order⁶.

The Church in Chile has pressured the government to clarify the situation of hundreds of persons who have disappeared. We unite ourselves with the anguish of the Archbishop of

Managua who is making every effort to overcome the political crisis of his country through the use of peaceful means.

I want to express my gratitude for the many expressions of solidarity with the petition that the members of the English Parliament made and that has given me great honor because they have nominated me as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize⁷. In particular, I have received statements of support from CUTS and C.T.S. and other organizations and individuals whom I consider to be very solid and persons of conviction. I wanted to give thanks for these expressions of solidarity by writing an article (as I do every week) for *La Prensa Gráfica*. Perhaps there was not enough space to publish it this week and so I hope that it will be published next week. In any case, through this radio broadcast (and thanks to God we have a large audience) I believe that my gratitude will be heard by everyone. I want to tell you that this deals with nominating me as a candidate and I thank the English Parliament for this gesture. I know that there are other persons with greater merit than I. Nevertheless, with no expectation of obtaining this International Prize, the voice of the English Parliament has been a powerful support and for this I will always be grateful. Thank you very much!

I also want to thank you for the many expressions of condolences that have arrived as a result of the death of Father Rafael Ernesto Barrera⁸, the pastor of San Sebastián in Ciudad Delgado. I want to tell you that the celebration of the funeral rites was truly impressive. I believe we heard the voice of the people who love their priests. I was saddened by the inopportune shouts and protests of the Popular Revolutionary Bloc; inside the Church, however, the hymns of the Christian community that prayed and received the message at the time of death were very impressive.

An Investigative Commission that was named to look into the events surrounding the tragic death of Father Barrera and his companions has issued two bulletins. The first bulletin⁹ was sent to the media but was not published in its entirety and it seems that some of the media have tried to distort the information. The Commission has found obvious contradictions in the media. For example, in *El Diario de Hoy*, ...*the police pursued the driver of the automobile with license plate number who exited the car and left the car in the street in front of the house.* According to the official statement, this vehicle was in the garage of the house. Other contradictions: one statement refers to a group of five young people while *La Prensa Gráfica* speaks of twenty-eight men. *La Prensa Gráfica* reported that according to those in charge of this operation, those persons who were in the house were shot. According to the version of eye-witnesses each time that the security forces opened fire the sounds of whistles could be heard coming from inside the house. The official statement and *El Diario de Hoy* refers to four men and *La Prensa Gráfica* refers to twenty-eight men.

The official statement (and this is very important) is the only one that refers to certain details about the case of José Isidro Paz. The official statement points out that ... *he was gravely wounded, near death.* According to the *Prensa Gráfica* ... *he was injured and then left the house unmindful of his companions.* The same newspaper published a photograph of him leaving the house on foot and the television transmitted the same images and gave the impression that he was not gravely wounded. Later, *El Diario de Hoy* reported that he left the house with his hands raised. With regard to the death of Mr. Paz, the official statement says: *according to official sources, he died when he was transferred to the hospital.* According to the bulletin of the Department of Public Relations of the National Police ...*Portillo Paz died in the conflict.*

The Bulletin of the Investigating Commission concludes: *There are well founded reasons to doubt the truthfulness of the distinct versions of events that up until now have been*

*published*¹⁰. The Commission then issued a second bulletin¹¹ in which they state: There is decisive proof that José Isidro Portillo Paz, one of the four people who died in the incident that occurred on Tuesday, November 28th, was captured alive and left the house on foot. After being presented to newspaper and television reporters he was assassinated by the Security Forces while he was in their jurisdiction. He was shot in the head and according to the report of the forensic doctor the bullet destroyed the encephalic mass. He left the house on foot and the forensic doctor has stated that this man's brain was shattered by a bullet.

“The fact that the Security Forces assassinated him is sufficient motive to believe that he was eliminated in order to avoid being brought before the court where he would have revealed the truth of the events that occurred and unmasked the maneuvers of the Security Forces.” My sisters and brothers, the Church does not have great means at her disposal, but we will not forget this case and in light of our demands for the respect of human rights we want to place blame on the Security Forces for this assassination, the assassination of a man who could have been saved but his life was taken by destroying the encephalic mass.

“Since the forensic doctor does not specify how death occurred or if the body presented signs of rigor mortis or how long he was dead, it is impossible to determine if the other three persons, one of whom was Father Ernesto Barrera, died during the supposed confrontation or after. For this reason, we are not surprised that there are people who assure us that they had been killed before the shoot-out.”

“With regard to the priest there are strong indications that lead us to the presumption that he was tortured and shot at close range.”

It seems highly unlikely that four men armed with only two light arms could have confronted for five hours 150 members of the Security forces armed who were fully armed.

It must also be borne in mind: “that at 7:00am of the same day the young man José David Ramos García was captured by the Security Forces near the house where this military operation took place. He was weeping when they captured him and clearly suffering a nervous attack. This young man is undergoing psychiatric treatment and therefore he is unable to make any statements.” In the name of human rights we say: *it is right to free this poor man.*

With regard to the political affiliation and activities of Father Ernesto Barrera, which has been the cause of many slanderous commentaries, I can tell you with complete sincerity: *I have no personal knowledge of this matter.* In any case, you know my thinking about all of this because I have spoken about this in my Pastoral Letter, *The Church and Popular Organizations*. I spoke about the role of the priest and this is a norm that is demanded of every priest: *It is normal, and indeed frequently happens, that priests and their closest lay collaborators, precisely because they want to preach a realistic and committed gospel, should have a keen awareness of political problems and, as citizens, should feel more drawn toward one political party or popular organization than to another. Likewise it is understandable that, when they are asked, they will work to guide, in a Christian perspective, the political activities of Christians striving for justice. It is, however, our duty to remind them that, in whatever priestly or pastoral work they are asked to perform by individuals, political parties, or other organizations, they should make it their first concern to be animators and guides in faith and in the justice that faith demands in accordance with the general Christian principles we have already dwelt on.*¹²

I want to remind those who want to involve the Church in terrorist activity of the thoughts that I expressed in my Pastoral Letter: *There is another dangerous kind of violence that some call revolutionary, but which we prefer to describe as sedition or terrorism, for the word revolutionary does not always have the pejorative sense we intend here. We are talking of the violence that Paul VI referred to as the explosive revolutions of despair. This form of violence is usually organized and pursued in the form of guerrilla warfare or terrorism and is wrongly thought of as the final and only effective way to change a social situation. It is a violence that produces and provokes useless and unjustifiable bloodshed, abandons society to explosive tensions beyond the control of reason, and disparages in principle any form of dialogue as a possible means of solving social conflicts.*¹³

I have also condemned fanatical violence and stated: *The cult of violence, which becomes almost a mystique or religion for some individuals and groups, is doing immeasurable harm to our people. They preach violence as the only way to achieve justice and they propound and practice it as a method to bring justice to this country. This pathological mentality makes it impossible to check the spiral of violence and it contributes to the extreme polarization of different groups within our society.*¹⁴

My brothers and sisters, here you have a clear expression of the Church's thinking with regard to becoming involved in dangerous activities for which the Church has no responsibility.

We have celebrated another anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Children. Yet we are pained when we consider the fact that for many people this document is pure utopia. For example, the fourth principle states: *The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health. To this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to him and to his mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.*

We are saddened and we express our solidarity with those who have seen their property set afire¹⁵. We continue to call upon the authorities to investigate these disgraceful crimes that remain unexplained.

We unite ourselves to the two English bankers¹⁶ who have been abducted even though no group has taken responsibility for this abduction. We ask that these men be freed. We also unite ourselves to the manager of Philips¹⁷ who was abducted by FARN.

As you can see, this is what the priest, Papias, said when he referred to the gospel of Saint Mark: it is disordered because it deals with a copy of Saint Peter's preaching, a preaching that is not theoretical but that attempts to enlighten the realities of his time with the Word of God, the realities of Rome and the emperor Nero, with the Word of God. This explains why the gospel passages should also be for us the light that illuminates the paths of justice and goodness and that rejects the evil of injustice and abuse.

I invite you to enter into this Advent, into this time of spiritual preparation for Christmas with this sense that I have spoken about: a hunger for God. Let us become poor in spirit and in need of God. Let us be watchful and attentive to the presence of God in the poor, in our friends, in our sisters and brothers so that we treat these people in the same way that we

would treat Christ. As Christians, let us bring a committed presence to our society where we are called to be the heralds of the Kingdom of God! So be it!

¹ Eusebius of Cesarea, Church history, III, 59, 15.

² *Ibid.*

³ The full text was published in *Orientación* in its editions for 17, 24, 31 December 1978 and 7 January 1979.

⁴ See Allocution of John Paul II on the feast of Christ the King (26 November 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 3 December 1978.

⁵ On 1 December 1978 John Paul II received in private audience Dr José Antonio Rodríguez Porth, Minister of Foreign Relations of El Salvador. See *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1978.

⁶ Discourse of Paul VI to the Ambassador of El Salvador to the Vatican, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 December 1977.

⁷ In October 1978, 118 parliamentarians of Great Britain proposed Mons. Romero as a candidate for the Nobel Peace prize. The official letter of this nomination was published in *Orientación*, 10 December 1978.

⁸ Fr Rafael Ernesto Barrera Motto and his companions, José Isidro Portillo Paz, Rafael Santos Ortiz and Valentín Martínez Piche were assassinated on 28 November 1978.

⁹ See Boletín Informativo n° 51 of the Secretariat for Social Communication of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, *Orientación*, 3 December 1978. The quotations from the newspapers quoted in this bulletin can be found in *La Prensa Gráfica* and *El Diario de Hoy* for 29 & 30 November 1978. The official communiqué of the Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic was published in these papers on 29 November 1978.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See Boletín Informativo of the Secretariat for Social Communication of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, *Orientación*, 10 December 1978. The passages between commas that follow are textual quotations from this bulletin.

¹² *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*. Third Pastoral Letter of Mons. Oscar A. Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, and the First of Mons. Arturo Rivera Damas, Bishop of Santiago María (6 August 1978), pp. 35-36.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ On 30 November 1978 a fire destroyed the municipal market in Usulután. See *El Mundo*, 1 December 1978.

¹⁶ Ian Cameron Massie and Michael Chatterton, manager and submanager of the Bank of London and South America, were kidnapped on 30 November 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 2 December 1978.

¹⁷ Fritz Schuitema was kidnapped on 24 November 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 30 November 1978.