

THE LORD COMES: LET US PREPARE HIS WAY

**Second Sunday of Advent
December 10, 1978**

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

My beloved sisters and brothers.

Your applause, which is the applause of a people who are truly free and worthy, the applause of a people who have just listened to the words that were spoken by Dr. Roberto Lara Velado¹ on the occasion of celebrating another anniversary of the promulgation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights --- your applause is the best support that can be given to our faith in the Word of God that illuminates the political, social and economic situation from the authentic perspective of God who created man and woman,. The Church assumes, as a sacred commitment, this work of dignifying our present situation. I thank Dr. Lara Velado for having placed before us this morning not simply *a small contribution* because his words --- words that continue to be faithful in interpreting the message of God --- provide us with a powerful support.

This message of God is based on Sacred Scripture and the language of the Church that becomes her lived prayer --- prayer that is called liturgy. During these weeks of preparation for the Nativity, the liturgy fills us with hope and joy. Last Sunday we said that Advent was a time of joyful waiting. Today the Sacred Liturgy begins with a cry of joy and hope: *Let us go out to meet the Lord! The Lord is coming!* In our prayer we asked God to remove all the obstacles that might hinder our ability to encounter God.

In My homily I will develop the following three ideas: First, The coming of God; Second, The paths on which God comes to women and men; Third, Christ is the way.

The Lord comes

The fact that God comes to save us is the liturgical meaning of the Word that gives unity and depth to this time of preparation for the feast of the Nativity, this season that is called Advent (the coming, the preparation for an encounter). Who, at some time, has not had this experience of Advent, this experience of preparing to receive a friend, a son or daughter, a spouse or a parent who is coming from a distant place? One prepares the home and gets ready to welcome the person with a warm and cordial celebration (the greater one loves the person, the warmer the celebration). This gives us insight into what the Church wishes to achieve during this time, namely, a warm preparation.

God comes to save us --- this is the theological meaning that is expressed by the Second Vatican Council when the bishops refer to the dignity of the human person (a reality that Dr. Lara Velado has just placed before us). The Council states: *the dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God* (1). Saint Augustine, a great

humanist, said: *you have created us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you*². There is a mutual attraction between the God who created us for himself and men and women who have been gifted with intelligence, freedom and many abilities that must not be abused but used to discover their fullness in the One who is the objective of their nature, the One who is the beginning and the end of their being.

This Sunday the three readings provide Christians with a spiritual framework for this season of Advent and speak to us about the fact that the destiny of the human person corresponds to God's desire. When the hearts of people express noble and intimate sentiments, they demand respect for their dignity as images of God. Then (as we have just heard from this layman) there is a desire to belong to God and they are not satisfied until they find themselves with God who also desires to encounter women and men.

The first reading refers to the final days of the Babylonian exile. These chapters are called Second Isaiah --- an anonymous prophet who was inspired by the hopes of Isaiah and who saw God's punishment of the people as drawing to a close. The time of exile will come to an end and people will return to their homeland. Listen to this command of the Lord: *Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated* (2). *A voice cries out: in the desert prepare the way of the Lord.* Then the prophet describes this procession of people as an epiphany, a revelation of God who shines forth in the arid desert, in the journey of the people who return from exile, in the people who rejoice as they find themselves once again in their homeland.

The Bedouins of the desert, like the Eastern poets, say that when the winds of the desert produce a strange sound it appears to be a cry, a human cry. They ask a question and then answer their own question: *Do you hear, my sisters and brothers, how the wind cries out? The desert is sad and cries out because it wants to be a fertile meadow.* When one has known the desert, what else could be more frightening? Sand, desert, sun, dryness! Indeed, the oriental mind experiences the anxiety of changing these sands into a garden, into meadows and forests. This was Isaiah's experience and what he wanted to express when he referred to the transformation of the arid desert into a garden: the hope of a people who returned from slavery and the punishment of oppression --- the arms of freedom, and the joy of experiencing oneself as a member of a worthy and an autonomous people.

The first reading presents us with a redemptive meaning. The prophet says that all of this occurred because of the sins, the idolatries, the social injustices and the abuses of the kings who held power. Thus God has punished his people but the prophet adds: *God is satisfied* (3). Even though they are sinners God does not delight in making people suffer. God wants people to experience the joy and happiness that God alone is able to give to people and that cannot be found in the realities of the world. God is jealous and desires to fill the hearts of people with joy --- therefore when people separate themselves from God they experience an emptiness.

The second reading, taken from Saint Peter's letters, orients us with regard to the encounter with God. In modern terms Saint Paul tells us not to confuse theological nearness with cosmological nearness. Let me explain this. During the time of the Apostles there was a great concern: people wanted to know if the promised coming of Christ to judge the world was near at hand --- would they see the second coming of Christ. When these people died, many of their generation were afflicted because their enemies laughed at them: *Poor*

demons! Waiting for a hope that was never realized! Saint Peter writes to them to strengthen their hope: *Be patient! With the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day!* (4).

Chronological categories of time have no meaning for God. God gives great consideration to a deep concern: *Be patient because the patient waiting for God is a time for the children of God to change their ways* (5). God desires to encounter women and men. This might occur at a very late stage in one's life, when one's life has passed and now in old age all that remains is the rotten fruit of youthful years that were lived with no thought of tomorrow. Yet God is still waiting patiently for this person. This encounter can also occur during the time of one's youth and we have examples of young women and men who have found happiness in their God. In summary, for God time is like the comparison of a thousand years to one day. For God there is something more important, namely, his saving work, his encounter with women and men regardless of whether these people are young or old or children, regardless of whether this happens at the present time or later at some future time. God hopes that the family that he created and placed in this world will share happiness, joy, and divine life with him: *You, Lord, created us to be yours!*³

Thus the second reading speaks to us about the destiny of humanity and all nations as a movement toward a new heaven and a new earth so that in this way people do not remain on their knees adoring the gods of this earth, gods that consume their whole lives. The second letter of Saint Peter (6) speaks of the destruction of the elements of this world in very apocalyptic language. This was obviously based on then contemporary apocalyptic literature (not Christian) that intuitively reached the conclusion that natural things would come to an end. This literature referred to a cataclysm --- fires in the heavens, fires destroying material things. We should not understand all of this literally. The use of this Eastern style of language and this fantastic description of fire and the final days leads us to understand a great reality: what exists in time has a relative value --- it will eventually pass away. Only the new heaven and the new earth that God has promised --- only these will form the true paradise. It is in the new heaven and the new earth (7) that God's definitive encounter with humanity will take place. We are journeying toward the new heaven and the new earth! Here on this earth we must make this encounter a part of our own lives, an encounter that occurs in our own hearts and in our own homes --- and it should be God whom we encounter in these places.

My beloved sisters and brothers, may those who might give prophetic eloquence to my words, may they be shaken from their passivity and no longer kneel down before the idols of this world. Here I refer to those who have made idols out of the goods of this earth, those who want gold, money, land, power and politics to be their ultimate destiny. Where does all of this lead a person? This will only end with the boast of having been a person involved in politics or a person who had a large amount of money. But the question remains: has one been faithful to the will of God. A person must know how to live in the midst of the passing realities of this earth and live according to God's will. The realities of this world should not be made into absolutes because there is only one absolute and that is the One who is waiting to meet us in the new heaven and the new earth that will not pass away. With a divine jealousy God said: *There is only one God and there are no other gods besides me* (8). These words were spoken so that nothing would be adored here on earth, so that on earth and in heaven it might be known that women and men were created by God and therefore they find their satisfaction only in God.

This is the message of Advent: the Lord who comes and the individuals who want to go out to meet him --- the Church is preparing this community for the celebration of Christmas, preparing this community to celebrate Christmas not as some secular business day, a day filled with vice and gluttony and business success. How sad that Christmas has been commercialized and that we do not understand the fact that Christmas is that time when God desires to encounter people and that people will not be happy as long as they do not encounter God!

The paths on which God comes to people

I want to respond to another question: what paths will God use to enter history? On which paths will we concretely encounter this God who comes to save? On which crossroads, on which dead end streets will El Salvador find salvation in God? Or are people going to laugh at us as they laughed at the Christians to whom Saint Peter wrote his letter? No, my sisters and brothers, this is not some illusion! God is coming and his paths are near to us. God saves in history. Each person's history and each person's life is the place where we meet God. How satisfying to know that people do not have to go to the desert to meet him nor do they have to travel to some specific place in the world! God is in our hearts! Jesus said: *The Kingdom of God is within you* (9). The paths of God are the paths of history, the concrete paths of our national life, our family life and our personal life.

It is beautiful to read Isaiah's description concerning the paths of Israel: *Where will God meet this poor, humiliated, exiled and oppressed people --- oppressed by invaders who took away their freedom and made them captives.* Who would have believed that on the very paths along which the invaders traveled to humiliate the people of the Holy Land, the People of God would travel triumphantly, singing: *I rejoiced when they said to me, "Let us go up to the house of the Lord"?* (10) Jerusalem was the center of Jewish life and without Jerusalem they felt like a people who had died. Remember the beautiful psalm about the rivers of Babylon: *By the rivers of Babylon our captors asked us for the words of a song, our tormentors for a joyful song: "Sing to us a song of Zion!" But how could we sing a song of the Lord in a foreign land?* (11). What a sense of patriotism! I believe that this sense of patriotism was enlivened during the time of the Exile because it was during this time that people began to hope that they would return to their homeland ---that the nation was not lost. God made use of these humiliations in order to give people an even greater glory when they returned and amended their lives.

Historians tell us that during the time of Isaiah when the image of a god or when an emperor or a king would enter the city, the roads were prepared in the same way that today the highways are repaired for the visit of an important person. Isaiah is using this image when he says: *Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed* (12). This passage of Isaiah that refers to the preparation of the paths --- this passage has the privilege of having given life to the people. The path on which God encounters people is the path of their own lives --- for this reason it is called the path of life. Thus the way in which people conduct their lives is most important. If we walk along the paths of evil then we are not headed in the direction to encounter God. If, however, our conduct is in accord with the law and the will of God, that we are encountering God. The encounter with God and with people will be the same. The way people create the history of El Salvador determines how people will encounter God. If our history moves along the paths of evil, if injustice abounds and our

country becomes materialistic, then these are not the paths of the Lord. *Make straight the paths of the Lord* is the voice of Advent, the voice of the prophets whose words are echoed by John the Baptist, the last of the prophets: *Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths* (13).

The gospel is most beautiful. This year, as we listen to the readings that are taken from the Gospel of Saint Mark, I beg you to reflect on these beautiful passages that were written by Saint Peter's secretary. Saint Mark, as well as Saint Peter, tells us that the gospel is not an account of Jesus' life but rather is the very power and the divine presence of Jesus who came into the world. Thus, in the very first verse of Saint Mark's gospel we heard these solemn words: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God* (14). It is as though Saint Mark is telling us that everything rests on knowing Christ --- the miracles and the history are of secondary importance. It is most important to discover the identity of Christ because God has entered the history of Israel in this humble child of the Virgin of Nazareth and God will enter the life of each person who becomes Christian. Indeed, Christ will be found among every people and in each person to the degree that they know how to choose that which is most important. The Church -- when St Peter speaks in the second reading -- also: *The Lord is being patient with you all, wanting nobody to be lost and everybody brought to change his ways.* (15) These are the ways. The gospel of Saint Mark summarizes the preaching of John the Baptist, Christ and the Church: *prepare the way of the Lord* (16).

The person of John is presented to us as a way, a path --- indeed he is a man who becomes a path. In fact, this is what each Christian should become: a person who becomes a path, a light, a witness. A person like John the Baptist, with his virtues and integrity, preaches not only when he stands and points toward the Lamb of God but also preaches when he clothes himself in the same austerity and poverty and simplicity and courageously confronts even the king who wishes to cut off his head and tells him: *It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife* (17). He cries out this denunciation even at the cost of his life. Only those persons, with the greatness they possess, can call upon people to follow them. Yet these people will also say: *One mightier than I is coming after me and I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I do nothing more than point out the One who saves the world. I am not the Savior* (18).

Christians must be as transparent as John the Baptist in order to point out that there exists a power who will save the world: God who became man in the person of Jesus Christ. John Paul II, on the solemn occasion of the inauguration of his Pontificate, cried out in Saint Peter's Square, cried out before the world the same cries of John the Baptist⁴: *Open the doors to Christ! Do not be afraid! I speak to people of every walk of life --- politicians, economists, men and women of the world --- do not be afraid! Only Jesus Christ has the words! Only Jesus Christ has the words of eternal life!* This is the mission of the Church and therefore each one of us who are the Church, if we truly want to honor this People of God into whom we have become incorporated through Baptism --- each one of us has to make ourselves as transparent as possible to the presence of Christ, the Savior of all people in the world. We cannot believe in other salvations and therefore we must proclaim the only Savior. Finally, we should not confuse the integral liberation of Christ with other partial liberations of the earth. These, then, are our paths.

Life of the Church

My third thought is about Christ. Christ is the great path and the encounter with God. Before concluding with this thought, I want to pause here because, yes --- our lives and the history of our people are the concrete paths on which God is coming forth today, during this year of 1978, to save the people of El Salvador. Therefore it is necessary to know these paths. For this reason I am always concerned that the preaching of the gospel be incarnated in reality and illuminate the realities of the week. What I do here is simply give you an example of how we must make every effort to meditate on the Word of God: I give you an example but I am very aware of the complexity of our history and that often my perspective here is very incomplete --- indeed each family and every one of us as individuals has our own history. Therefore in light of the gospel that is the only reality that illuminates and saves, each family has to enlighten the history of their own home and their own conscience.

This week I embrace and am thankful for the Pope's words and teaching. Look at how the Pope is concerned about the concrete realities that he has experienced during the week. He asked the United Nations to help the refugees from Viet Nam. He denounced the fact that there are so few countries that have offered to receive these poor refugees⁵. He also pleaded for the freedom of an Italian woman who has been held captive for fifty-five days by her abductors⁶. He spoke about the situation in Nicaragua and demanded freedom for the people of this sister Republic of ours and pointed out the religiosity, faith and hope of the people of Nicaragua and exhorted them to remain faithful to their Christian inspiration and not become discouraged⁷. He sent Cardinal Berroli to mediate the crisis in Lebanon⁸. Look at how the Pope lives the realities that occur in our world! We see that he is a Shepherd who is illuminated like Moses was in the desert and who now walks in the midst of the reality of a people who hunger and thirst and murmur because they fear they have become lost!

I want to congratulate a group of priests from our Archdiocese who spent time together on a spiritual retreat. Look at how the priests seek to actualize their identity because they realize that they must develop and live their priesthood in very difficult situations in this world, situations in which they are slandered and misunderstood and therefore it is necessary that they remain faithful to their priestly identity.

While speaking about the priesthood I must sadly speak about a reality that I would have preferred to see remain private, but since it has been made public, and made public with a certain maliciousness, I want to publicly clarify this situation. Several times a suspicion and question has been raised in the newspaper *La Prensa Gráfica*: Why was Bishop Revelo removed from his position as Vicar-General⁹. This was a private memo that should have been given to him privately. How has this memo been made public? The Chancery has not made this memo public and now an evil interpretation has been given to this memo hinting that the Auxiliary Bishop and I are in disagreement about politics --- that the Auxiliary Bishop does not want to follow my *harsh guidelines* (words used by the newspaper). This is not true. You know that I respect the opinion of everyone and anyone who is in communion with the Church. So then, what has happened? This has involved the fulfillment of Canon Law¹⁰. Canon 366 says: *The Vicar General is designated freely by the bishop, who can remove him at his discretion* and Canon 369 states: *The Vicar General refers the principal acts of the Curia to the bishop and will inform him of those things done or that ought to be done for the protection of clerical and lay discipline. He shall take care lest his powers be used against the mind and will of the bishop*. Those who are aware of the situation that occurred with regard to changing the Statutes of Caritas in El Salvador¹¹ have a sufficient explanation -- this involved an abuse of power that cannot be tolerated in any minister (and is not tolerated in any governmental ministry). It was this abuse of power that motivated the

removal of the Vicar-General. Aside from this we continue to live in union with one another and he will continue to work as the Auxiliary Bishop since this ministry is directly dependent on the Holy See.

With regard to the situation of Caritas I want to let you know that we have presented a juridical denunciation before the Interior Ministry because all the jurists are in agreement that this was an illegal action. They also see this action as a disregard for the authority of the Archbishop who is the only person who can authorize a change in the Statutes. The opinion of the Archbishop was not taken into consideration in this matter.

We refer also with joy to the different communities we have visited. Mainly today I would like to mention the parish of San Sebastián in Ciudad Delgado where a pious novena was celebrated for the repose of Fr Rafael Ernesto Barrera.

I also want to clarify some matters regarding the case of Father Ernesto Barrera since during the past few days the press did not provide space for the statements of the Secretariat of the Chancery even though they printed the statements of the FPL¹² and provided details which have given great scandal. Concerning all of this we can say the following: we are awaiting proof that these are authentic statements of the FPL. Even if they are authentic statements I want to speak out about the supposed political activity of Father Ernest Barrera as a member of the FPL. I reaffirm what I stated last Sunday: I have not received any direct information concerning this matter and I am aware of this only because of the facts that have been published in the newspapers

There is no proof of the truthfulness or the authenticity of this information but in light of the publication of certain details I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm the position of the Archdiocesan Church which has been clearly stated in my Pastoral Letter¹³, *The Church and Popular Political Organizations: It is, however, our duty to remind them [the priests] 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 ... The priests' main task is to keep alive the gospel standards of thought and action, to remind the faithful, as Jesus did, of the love of the Father for all, and to urge them on to follow Jesus in implanting the kingdom of God on earth ... If, in an exceptional case, a priest were asked to work more closely in the political process --- and the case would be exceptional because the priest would be acting in a supplementary role that has nothing to do with the normal vocation and ministry of a priest --- it would be for the bishop, after a frank discussion with the priest in the light of faith, to make a Christian judgment on the apostolic value of the work in question¹⁴.*

Each time that I dialogued with Father Ernesto Barrera we spoke about the importance and the challenges of being an animator and a guide for people in matters of faith and justice --- all of which are faith demands in this area of pastoral ministry with workers. He never communicated to me the fact that he was an exceptional case, that is, that he was collaborating with the concrete political objectives of some political organization or that he had become a member of the FPL. I have no proof of that 'fact'. I was never given any information about this matter. If it is true that he was a member of this organization, he did so without the knowledge of the Archbishop. Thus I want to say to all the pastoral ministers in the Archdiocese that the pastoral guidelines of the Archdiocese are clear and defined and will not change.

I want to say something more about the inappropriateness that results very often from the assumptions by certain groups. I previously said it was inappropriate for members of the Bloc to cry out for vengeance during the burial of Father Neto Barrera. Vengeance is a word that is foreign to the language of the Church. Now the FPL wants to award membership in the group to Neto Barrera. Thus our radio station YSAX commented: *... the pastoral orientation is clear ... those priests who are intimately associated with groups such as FPL, ERP, FARN and others are, in reality, providing an inadequate service to the Church, the Archbishop and the cause of the poor. The members of the FPL also provide an inadequate service to the Church when they boast about the fact that a priest is one of their members. But we must understand that they (the FPL) are not concerned about the Church or the careful manner in which the Church proclaims the Kingdom of God here in El Salvador. They also are not concerned about the harm that they can cause the Church because any careful observer of the situation would know that if someone wants to harm the Archbishop at this time, the best way to do it would be to say that Father Barrera is a member of the FPL. Because of this fact their statement is suspect and one can wonder if this statement has been made by the FPL or by agents of the extreme right who want to harm the Archbishop. Yet this very harm is changed into something that is good. As a result of all of this, it ought to be very clear that not only is the Archbishop not with the FPL but also the FPL is not with the Archbishop --- if they were they would have tried to protect his image and respect his good intention.*

I do not want it to be said that the Archbishop is ingenious and that priests like Father Barrera are exercising a political role behind the Archbishop's back. Let us be very clear, the Church does not have a system of internal vigilance like the Armed Forces who commit all kinds of misdeeds that the authorities are unaware of. Today the newspapers report¹⁵ that a Major, who is part of the High Command, was surprised in an armed robbery of 25,000,000 colones.

I also want to be clear about what I have seen as I accompanied Father Neto Barrera, especially at the time of his death, and what I have seen in the community that shared the pain of Father and his family, namely, there were many good things in Father. Many people are aware of the good priestly characteristics of Father Neto ... there are abundant proofs of this fact. His frequent exercise of the ministerial priesthood removes every suspicion of any political commitment that is forbidden by the Archbishop. I remember that one of his last interventions was a request for solidarity with the Archbishop and this fact places in doubt the authenticity of the statement of the FPL which cannot be accepted as a definitive fact until it is absolutely proven.

I want to remind you that the investigating Commission has not concluded its work but will continue to provide us with the results of their investigation. Be patient because as Saint Peter has told us today: *with the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day* (19). The impatience of those who want to slander us ought to give way to patience in our quest for the truth --- the truth that opens paths more majestically than the turbulences of hatred and iniquity.

I traveled to Tonacatepeque on the occasion of their patronal feast, Saint Nicholas. I also visited the community of Plan del Pino to comfort a widow, some orphans and members of the parish.

In the village of La Junta in Comalapa, the members of the parish of Nueva Concepción of Chalatenango have been saddened by the sacrilegious theft of the hosts and the sacred vessels.

In Potonico, Chalatenango, the hosts were stolen last week, and this week, on Saturday 20 December at 10.00 am, we will celebrate an act of reparation to which I invite all the villages near Potonico.

I would like to congratulate the parish of Candelaria in Cuscatlán and its parish priest, Fr Interiano, on their patronal feast of the Name of Mary and for the extension of their parish school. The same to the parish priest and parish of San Rafael Cedros which will be holding the 6th graduation of the San Rafael school on 16 December.

In La Libertad I had the pleasure of seeing a very lively community where North American priests from Cleveland and North American Maryknoll Sisters, the Daughters of Charity and the Ursalines are ministering together. On the morning of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the Parish Pastoral Council was created.

December 8th was the feast of the Immaculate Conception and various religious communities celebrated this feast in a special way. Sister Angela María Cáceres, a member of the Oblates of the Sacred Heart ministering in Dulce Nombre de María, celebrated twenty-five years of religious life. The Sisters of the Good Shepherd also gave enthusiastic homage to the Virgin. In the community of Cojutepeque there is an historical relic of great value because there people venerate the image of the Immaculate Conception, an image that was crowned as a result of the dogmatic definition of 1854.

At the same time, another important feast of the Virgin is drawing near, the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe. At this time I want to greet the members of the community of La Ceiba and all the parishes that venerate the Virgin of Guadalupe and also all those persons who bear the name of the Virgin.

This afternoon at 4:00pm we will celebrate the patronal feast of Portrero Grande in Aguilares.

On behalf of the community of Colonia Amatepec I want to invite the young people to a youth gathering which began at 8:00am in Colegio Cristóbal Colón in Colonia Centro América. Father Luis Burguet awaits you there. Father Burguet, who is in charge of Amatepec, wishes to announce that the blessing of the Church and the conferral of Confirmation which had been planned for next Sunday has been rescheduled for Sunday, December 24th, when I will also have the joy of being with the members of this community.

I also want to announce that the Commission for the Laity has prepared a gathering of the Base Communities and lay movements for next Sunday, December 17th. The theme of this meeting will be: community. This event will take place in Colegio Guadalupano. We want to invite all Catholics who belong to the Base Communities to participate in this gathering so that you might renew yourselves in this pastoral initiative that takes place in small groups and where people are able to become more deeply aware of the Biblical meaning of our faith.

In the afternoon of the same day we had an ecumenical gathering with our Baptist sisters and brothers. Brother Charles Harper from the World Council of Churches was present and

he brought greetings from this group (the World Council of Churches) as well as the members of the Symposium on Human Rights. He expressed their admiration for the Archdiocesan community. Thanks be to God for this evangelical witness!

Last Sunday members of the English Parliament visited. This body has nominated me for the Nobel Peace Prize and presented me with their petition that was accompanied by 118 signatures. I thanked them in the name of all the people with whom I share this great honor. One of the members of Parliament told me --- and I do not say this because of vanity because I have told you that this honor is made because of you and I put myself aside as I place you in the center of this nomination --- he said: *Now that I have come to know the reality in which you live I ask that this prize be presented to you not once, but twice.* They expressed their concern for the violation of human rights and I believe they have gathered sufficient data concerning this matter. They also analyzed the abductions that recently occurred, especially the abduction of the two men from their country.

I had the honor of receiving a visit from Reymond Chevaley, the regional delegate from the Red Cross in Central America. He is a man of good will who has placed himself at the service of our people during these difficult times and who is also helping the people of Nicaragua. We spoke about the recent abductions and some possible solutions.

I wish to mention a great honour, the letter one of the interpreters of the parliamentarians brought me. It was a letter signed by three great cardinals: the cardinal of England, the cardinal of Belgium, Cardinal Suenens, and the cardinal of Paris¹⁶ in ¹⁷which they express their brotherly and charitable feelings of solidarity because they say they know our situation and want to encourage us not to abandon our evangelical resolutions.

They also told me that in England, the pastoral letter on popular political organizations and their relations with the Church has been well received. As one bishop put it: "For its clear exposition of the Church's magisterium"; and it is being translated for publication in England.

Events of the week

I wish to speak about these abductions and although I have left this for last it is a great concern of mine. A man from Holland, Fritz Schuiteman was abducted by FARN on November 24th and two Englishmen, Ian Massie and Michael Chatterton were abducted by FARN on November 30th and lastly a Japanese man, Mr. Takakasu Suzuki was abducted on Saturday, December 7th by an unknown group.

I want to express my solidarity with these men and their families and I also want to let you know that I am willing to help in any way that is within the scope of my pastoral ministry. If my voice is being heard by those responsible for these abductions, then I want you to hear the pleas of the whole Church and want to tell you that you are mistaken if you believe that you can resolve the situations of the world by violating the right to freedom and the right to life --- this is not the solution. We have said that we support the just demands of people. We cannot, however, support in any way the abuse of human dignity. Therefore we beg you to do everything possible to free these men so that the homes of these men will not be deprived of the presence of their loved ones at this time of Christmas. I want everyone to hear the cries of the people of El Salvador, cries that shout out: *A Christmas without political prisoners and abductions.*

The voice of the poor always finds an echo when their voice is listened to. As I entered the Church a *campesino* from Pinar Metapán asked me to beg you to pray for his wife, Esther Martínez, who died on October 24th. He and his family are with us today and I want to tell you, my brother, that all the sorrows, especially the sorrows of those who suffer and who are poor --- all these sorrows find echo in the heart of the Church. We are happy to pray for your wife.

Christ is the path for our meeting with God

We conclude our homily by inviting you to move spiritually toward the altar where my third thought becomes a reality. In the gospel Saint Mark does not presume to present us with a life of Christ. Rather he tells us: *Here with us is God who became man*. It is the only gospel that begins with the words: *the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God* (20). When Christ the Son of God came into this world, people experienced that all the paths of their lives and all the paths of history had been joined to this one great path: *I am the way ... no one comes to the Father except through me* (21). There is salvation in Christ.

The three readings speak to us about Christ whom the prophets, in the midst of catastrophe, proclaimed to be the Savior. The second reading refers to the nearness of his coming but also speaks about this time of waiting for the conversion of women and men. According to the profound theology of Saint Mark, Christ himself is present among us. Let us meet Christ because he is not far away. Christ lives among his people. God saves in the midst of history and Christ is in that place where God meets every person. To encounter Christ is to encounter God. To place the hope of the nation in Christ is to say that God comes to save us. So be it.

¹ Before the homily Dr Roberto Lara Velado addressed a message, in the name of the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, to mark the 30th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It was received with warm applause.

² St Augustine, *Confessions*, I, 1: PL . 32, 661.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Homily of John Paul II on the official inauguration of his Pontificate (22 October 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 October 1978.

⁵ See Sunday Allocution of John Paul II (3 December 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1978.

⁶ In the general audience of 15 November 1978, John Paul II interceded for the freedom of Marcella Boroli Ballestrini, kidnapped in Milan. See *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 November 1978.

⁷ Discourse of John Paul II to the Ambassador of Nicaragua in the Vatican (7 December 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17 December 1978.

⁸ "Cardinal Bertoli sent by the Pope to Lebanon", *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1978.

⁹ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 29 & 30 November and 6 December 1978.

¹⁰ Mons. Romero quotes the *Code of Canon Law* of 1917, valid until the promulgation of the new Code in 1983.

¹¹ See "El caso de Caritas", *Orientación*, 19 November 1978.

¹² See "Padre Barrera, dice FPL, pertenecía a su movimiento", *La Prensa Gráfica*, 9 December 1978, and "Padre Barrera era guerrillero, dicen las FPL", *El Diario de Hoy*, 9 December 1978.

¹³ *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares* (6 August 1978), p. 36.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵ See *El Diario de Hoy*, 9 December 1978.

¹⁶ They are the Cardinals Basil Hume, Archbishop of Westminster, Leo Suenens, Archbishop of Brussels, and François Marty, Archbishop of Paris. See *Orientación*, 17 December 1978.

¹⁷ Takakazu Suzuki was an executive of INSINCA.

Marginal References (1) GS 19; (2) Is 40,1-2a,3; (3) Is 40,2; (4) 2P 3,8; (5) 2P 3,9; (6) 2P 3,12; (7) 2P 3,13; (8) Ex 20,3; (9) Lk 17,21; (10) Ps 122,1; (11) Ps 137,3-6; (12) Is 40,4-5; (13) Mk 1,2; (14) Mk 1,1; (15) 2P 3,9; (16) Mk 1,3; (17) Mt 14,4; (18) Mk 1,7; (19) 2P 3,8; (20) Mk 1,1; (21) Jn 14,6.