

## MARY, SIGN OF THE FULLNES OF TIME

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**  
**December 24, 1978**

*2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16*

*Romans 16:25-27*

*Luke 1:26-38*

My beloved sisters and brothers and radio audience.

The gospel which we have just heard focuses the attention of the Christian community on the beautiful image of the pregnant Virgin beside the manger --- this Virgin who is going to give birth tonight. The Virgin is called Mary and at the side of the manger in Bethlehem, Mary is the beautiful figure of Advent which turns into Christmas. This is the image of a story that is rooted in the mystery kept secret for long ages and that began to be revealed at the beginning of history, a history that was prepared for throughout the whole Old Testament and that now arrives at the *fullness of time*.

Liturgically we now move from Advent to Christmas. Four weeks ago the Church gathered us together to celebrate this long period of hope and preparation, this time of promise and proclamation --- this time that is called Advent. The whole Old Testament became present in our consideration of these Christmas preparations. Therefore, the person who best represents this history of the Old Testament is the woman who is pregnant and who will give birth tonight. This woman is seen throughout this long period of many centuries and is pointed out as that mysterious person who is drawing near to us --- and her name is Mary. How beautiful to be able to join ourselves to the Mother of Christ, to unite ourselves in love to this woman who has also become our Mother. May the liturgy of the fourth Sunday of Advent, which is the vigil of Christmas, be an enthusiastic and loving homage of the People of God to our Mother, the Blessed Virgin!

The title of our homily is *Mary, sign of the fullness of time*. As usual, we will develop the following three ideas: first, the mystery kept secret for long ages, second, the divine preparation in the Old Testament, third, the fullness of times symbolizes Mary pregnant with Jesus.

We will see that since redemption is operative throughout history, God desires to continue to operate in this way and save people through history. Therefore the proclamation of the gospel has to be a prolongation of the salvific plan of Christ, an application of this plan to our history, people and reality. A proclamation of the gospel and a celebration of Christmas that simply recounts a romantic story that occurred twenty centuries ago and that does not incarnate the saving plan of God in the tragic and painful realities of our history or in the hopes of our people --- such a proclamation would not be an authentic Christian message. God continues to save in history! Therefore as we return to this event of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, we do so not simply to remember the birth of Christ that occurred twenty centuries ago but to live this event in the Twentieth Century, in 1978, in this Christmas season in El Salvador. Thus, in light of the Biblical readings it is necessary to prolong the

whole history that God has in his eternal mind and this must include the concrete events of abductions and torture of our own sad history because it is here that we must encounter our God.

### **The mystery kept secret for long ages**

Let us call to mind the secret of the eternal centuries. Surprised by the greeting of the archangel who comes to her in the name of God, Mary is given her true name --- a name by which all people will know her: *greetings, favored one! Greetings, woman filled with grace! Greetings woman exalted above all women, the one who found favor in the eyes of God, the one chosen above all women!* (1). Surprised by this heavenly ambassador to earth Mary enters into a dialogue --- but not a dialogue rooted in rebellion but one that enabled her to become aware of the tremendous responsibility that was being given to her: *how can this be?*. The angel reveals that in Jesus the whole past is coming to light, the secret of the eternal centuries: *it is God who has chosen you.*

*A mystery kept secret for long ages* (2) --- this is what is revealed in Christ, in the gospel and this is what I also preach, namely that this Jesus, as the angel proclaimed to Mary, is a result of the power of the Most High, therefore the child to be born will be called the Son of God; he will be great and his throne will last forever! This is the immortal King of the centuries, the Savior who fulfills the hopes of humanity. One of the most eloquent proclamations of this fact was made by Saint Bernard, the noney-tongued doctor, who imagined the Virgin in silence reflecting on whether she will say *yes* or *no*. He says: *Mary speaks --- say "yes!" The course of our history is dependent on the words that come from your lips and our hope depends on the consent that God asks of you.*<sup>1</sup>

Mary, the prudent Virgin, experiences the reality of being illuminated by faith. She experiences what Saint Paul tells us today: *It is a mystery and yet it is certain that God desires to save the world in Christ.* The history of salvation that begins in her womb reaches its culmination in the Son of God. Here we are referring to the divine origin and the greatness that the gospel proclaims as salvation that can only come from God. Today Saint Paul describes the God of salvation history: *Now to him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ ... made known to all the nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen* (3). Everything depends on God and the initiative is found hidden in the mind of God. If God had not revealed in Christ his infinite love for us, we would have loved God greatly but we would not have known God. It was necessary, therefore, to use the instrumentality of a woman named Mary so that his mind and his love could become incarnated. Thus, in *The Divine Comedy*, Dante speaks of *the Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, you are the concrete focal point of an eternal counsel. Centuries ago before things existed, God thought of you. You, blessed woman, full of grace, you are a pure woman in the mind of God. As a loved one continually thinks of his beloved, so too God loved you and loved you because you are a collaborator of his Incarnation and of his mind. He needs you! He loves you! You are blessed! The focal point of an eternal counsel*<sup>2</sup> ... because of her humility and smallness Mary was not aware of the fact that God in the eternity of time had her in his mind. At this moment in time, the Eternal Word by whom all things came into existence, the Word begins to be a fetus and then a child and finally a man crucified on Calvary. God needed the pure womb of the Virgin. How wonderful it is to consider that in this hidden, eternal secret of God is Mary! We were also part of that hidden eternal secret of God, but we were the object of his pity, the object of redemption. Mary was also the object

of redemption because she was a creature, a daughter of Adam, but at the same time she was also a collaborator taken from this group of sinners and made holy and pure and she became the instrument that enabled the Son of God to become man.

Everything begins with God. In the first reading, God sends the prophet to the king, the greatest person in Judea. In the gospel, God sends the archangel to speak to Mary. At this time in our history of 1978, at this present feast of Christmas that we will celebrate, it is the same God who is present with the same love and with the same objectives that were operative when Mary was sent to Bethlehem. It is the mind of God that becomes tenderness and adoration and hope. In Mary, it is God who comes to us. Let us not forget, my sisters and brothers, that the salvation of our history and the salvation of each one of us with our personal problems that appear to be known by no one and understood by no one --- yes, there is one who understands. From all eternity God has loved us and we are significant in this history that God desires to fulfill for his glory. It is for this reason that Saint Paul says that God has this eternal secret, *glory forever and ever* (4).

This is the Christmas joy: I know that I am a thought in God's mind no matter how insignificant I may be --- even if I am the most abandoned of human beings, one whom no one thinks of. Today when we think of Christmas gifts, how many outcasts are not thought about! Think to yourselves, you who are outcasts and you who feel that you are nothing in history: *I know that I am a thought in God's mind*. Would that my voice might, like a ray of light, of Christmas hope, reach the imprisoned! Would that my voice might also speak to you, the sick, the elderly in homes for the aged, hospital patients, you that live in shacks and shantytowns, you coffee harvesters who are trying to garner your only wage for the whole year, you who are tortured: God's eternal purpose has thought of all of you. God loves you and like Mary, God incarnates that thought in your heart. You also have a mother and like me, you experience the joy of having at this Christmas time a mother who taught you the way to encounter your brother, Jesus, namely the Virgin Mary is that way. Let us experience this reality, my sisters and brothers, because all of us, with no distinction of social class, with no one being a first class or second class person, are sacred in the heart of God and the heart of Mary. God loves us and thought about us and the eternal counsel, hidden in the eternal centuries, is going to begin to be revealed.

### **The divine preparations in the Old Testament**

This is my second thought. Mary continues to be present in the mind of God when God begins his act of creation. God desires to save people in their historical context. If this mystery kept secret for long ages is going to be realized, then God desires that it be realized in an historical context. And therefore history begins. According to Biblical revelation, the first chapter of the salvation of humanity, the first realization of the salvation that God desires to make operative with humanity, the first chapter of the relationship between God and humankind is that of creation. Creation is the beginning of time. This must be kept in mind: creation, the natural order, that which God has created, the intelligence that God has bestowed upon the human person, the wealth of the land and the fruits that it has produced --- all of this was created by God. In this way we have the beginning of the history of salvation and the first chapter is that of creation: *Let there be light and water and minerals and cattle* (5). God says to the human person: *I have created everything for you and no one can possess these things with an absolute right. These things are for the happiness of the family that I created in the world* (6).

As the Vatican Council put together a brief synthesis of the history of salvation, we are told in the document on Divine Revelation: *Planning to make known the way of heavenly salvation, He went further and from the start manifested Himself to our first parents (7).* Creation had begun and now begins the order of eternal creation. And those first parents started by disobeying God.

And so *after their fall His promise of redemption aroused in them the hope of being saved and from that time on He ceaselessly kept the human race in His care, to give eternal life to those who perseveringly do good in search of (8).* Here, the literature of the New Testament refers to the centuries before the time of Abraham, the era of Adam, the era when the world began to become populated with human persons and when they began to take possession of the land. This time is often referred to as the time of ignorance (9) which is similar to that time in the life of an infant when parents begin to see their child take his/her first steps. Indeed, as infants their children are “ignorant” and have not yet reached the age of reason and so they ask questions and ask for things without really understanding what they are asking for.

*Then, at the time He had appointed He called Abraham in order to make of him a great nation. Through the patriarchs, and after them through Moses and the prophets, He taught this people to acknowledge Himself the one living and true God, provident father and just judge, and to wait for the Savior promised by Him, and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries (10).*

*After the age of the Patriarchs, he instructed the people through Moses and the prophets, so they could recognize Him as the one true God, as a provident father and just judge; and so wait for the promised Saviour. (11)* This was Moses’ mission when God charged him with leading the Jewish people out of their captivity in Egypt, traveling through the desert and then entering the Promised Land. It was an historical person who brought about the salvation that God desires to give to all people: to lead people out of slavery. God needs the prophets to make people aware of their dignity: *You do not have to be a slave to anyone, but rather must seek for the freedom that God offers you.* The book of *Exodus* is a wonderful book for all people to learn about their dignity.

We are still, then, in this context of creation. The human person is not born to be a slave or oppressed. Freedom is what makes us equal to God: *let us make man in our own image, after our likeness (12).* What distinguishes God is freedom which is shared with all his creatures. The human person has a relative freedom because this freedom consists in obeying the Creator: *I, the Lord, am your God ... you shall have no other gods besides me (13) ... I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God.* Moses and the prophets have planted the seeds of this freedom and denounced in strong language every attempt at oppression, every sin of abuse, and all those realities that disfigured the dignity of the human person. My sisters and brothers, read the marvelous prophetic books and there you will find what is now said to be thin shadows of that which we ought to proclaim in the name of God who is jealous about this freedom which should be reflected in the human person and in society. He gives us the courage of the true prophets to call by their proper name those who assassinate or enslave or adore other gods or separate themselves from the person of the true God, the image of this God that is found on earth, this man who was man from the moment he was conceived in the womb of a woman.

. Thus the Vatican Document continues and says: *and in this manner prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries (14).* How beautiful are these words which express the reality that we read about during this Christmas season, the reality of Mary

pregnant and about to give birth. As Mary gives birth tonight, she brings into the world the revelation of the infinite love of God --- an event that has been prepared for, unfolding, and being revealed throughout the centuries to the Chosen People

When referring to Mary, the Council speaks of this blessed woman who in the mind of God was preparing the way of the gospel: *The books of the Old Testament describe the history of salvation, by which the coming of Christ into the world was slowly prepared* (15). Does it not seem to you that as we have proclaimed the readings of the prophets during these Sundays of Advent, we have experienced the divine steps of someone who is drawing near to us? This is the Old Testament that is preparing for the coming of Christ into the world.

*These earliest documents, as they are read in the Church and are understood in the light of a further and full revelation, bring the figure of the woman, Mother of the Redeemer, into a gradually clearer light. When it is looked at in this way, she is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was given to our first parents after their fall into sin* (16). Mary appears in the beginning of history. When Adam and Eve are shamed and thrown out of Paradise, there appears the figure of a woman who would crush the head of the deceitful serpent and this prefigures Mary who will bring about victory over sin.

*She is the Virgin who shall conceive and bear a son, whose name will be called Emmanuel* (17). This is the prophecy of Isaiah (18) that made the king of Jerusalem tremble as the invading armies approached the Holy Land. The prophet announced that God was with Israel and as a sign of this protection he said that there would be a time when a virgin, without losing the glory of her virginity, would conceive and give birth to a son who would be called Emmanuel which means: God-with-us. It is beautiful to read on this Christmas Eve the prophecy of the Virgin who is pregnant: she will give birth and become a mother, but will continue to be a virgin. Then the gospel goes on to say: *and behold, Elizabeth, your relative, has also conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren; for nothing is impossible for God* (19). Thus Mary is told: *you shall continue to be a virgin and you will not lose your virginity. By the power of the Holy Spirit you will conceive and give birth to a child and your body will remain a mystery of virginity* (20). This is a foreshadowing of the former times which were a preparation for this holy night.

*She stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from Him* (21). All the aspirations of the Old Testament, all of the hunger for God: *Come Lord and save us!*, all the anguish of the prophets who ask God to send a savior as was promised --- all of this is alive in the heart of the Poor of Yahweh, the Virgin Mary.

We repeat here what we said on the First Sunday of Advent: no one can celebrate an authentic Christmas unless they are truly poor. The self-sufficient, the proud of heart, those who despise others because they do not possess the material goods of this earth, those who do not need or want God --- for these people there is no Christmas. Only the poor, the hungry, and those who need someone to come to them because they have need of someone, someone who is God, someone who is Emmanuel, God-with-us --- only these people are able to celebrate Christmas. Without the spirit of poverty one is unable to be filled with God. If God had not found the great emptiness of Mary's humility, he would not have come to the world because there would have been no one who could have been filled with God's grace. Therefore we have reason to be grateful to Mary because God had chosen her to be his mother because she was holy and humble, because no one else but she expressed the poverty of Israel, no one but Mary expressed the concerns of all the people. Mary is an expression of

the needs of the people of El Salvador, the expression of the anguish of those who are imprisoned, the expression of those mothers who are suffering because they have lost their sons and/or daughters and no one tells them anything about the whereabouts of their children. Mary is the tenderness that is anxiously seeking for a solution. Mary is in the midst of our country that at times appears like a dead end street, hoping that God will come to save us. Hopefully we will imitate this Poor Servant of Yahweh and experience the fact that without God we can do nothing because God is the hope of our people and only Jesus Christ, the Divine Savior, can be the Saviour of our nation.

The Council document continues: *With her the exalted Daughter of Sion, and after a long expectation of the promise, the times are fulfilled and the new Economy established, when the Son of God took a human nature from her, that He might in the mysteries of His flesh free man from sin (22).*

### **Mary, sign of the plenitude of time**

And this is my third thought: Mary, sign of the plenitude of time. It is going to take some effort on our part to understand how God saves in an historical context and how time is a necessary element in the salvific action of God. At this time it occurs to me to reflect on what happens when a painter is inspired to create a picture --- the first thing he does is spread out a blank canvas. This is what God did at the time of creation. He spread out a blank canvas ... and time began to move forward. Time began to move forward because it is in time that God painted the wonderful picture of salvation. him that his descendents will form a dynasty that will not end. He is the first link in this line of proclamations concerning Christ as the Messiah and King. When Jesus passes before the blind, the lepers and other persons in need, they cry out in anguish: *Son of David, have pity on us.*

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But thanks to God, there is someone who has perfectly accomplished his plans, someone who responds with the words that we heard in this morning's gospel: *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word* (25). There is no alienation here. Alienation is characteristic of those persons who say: *I will not serve you. I will act according to my own desires*. Such people are living the darkness of their being. The Council says that when people sin: *the thread that unites them with their Creator fades away and is broken and ruined* (26) or as Jesus said: *every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire* (27). Every sinner is a branch that is cut off. On the other hand, Mary tells the Lord that she is a branch that is firmly attached to the tree: *I do not want to separate myself from you. I want to bear fruit, that which you give me, that which is in your mind. May it be done to me according to your will* (28). This is the story of salvation.

Then the fullness of time arrived. According to the concept that we have analyzed, that is, the concept of time according to God, we see that the canvas that was extended by God had a central point of focus (just like the artist who undertakes a project and gives a central point of focus to his painting). The culminating point is called here the fullness of time. At the precise moment of the fullness of time the life of God comes to us. This is the moment when the Word becomes flesh in the womb of Mary and thus the life of God comes to humankind which for centuries, throughout the time of the Old Testament, was being prepared. Thus in the fullness of time the whole plan and richness of God who desires to elevate us and sanctify us is made present to us. The Council states: *The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light* (29). If people want to understand their own mystery: the meaning of their pain, their work, their anguish, their hope, then let those people place themselves at Jesus' side. In this way they will accomplish what Jesus accomplished: they will do the will of the Father and fill themselves with the life that Jesus shared with the world. Then these persons will develop themselves as true persons. If I compare myself with Christ and find that life is an antithesis and the opposite of his life, then my life is disaster. This mystery cannot be explained except by returning to Christ, the One who gives a real face to those who wish to be authentic persons. Salvation is only found in Christ.

Therefore in Christ is found all that which later he entrusted to his Church: *All power in heaven and earth has been given to me.*(30) *You, my apostles, whom I have chosen as my confidants, whom I have taught the mystery kept secret for long ages, the plan of God to save all nations and to present to all people the gift of Christian faith --- now I send you forth. Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned* (31). From the perspective of the Church we thus see the missionary Christ who sent forth others to communicate to them the treasure of salvation. Here, then, I experience a great honor because my poor words --- even though many despise these words and laugh at them --- become a vehicle of salvation. This vehicle carries the truth that saves, the plan of the eternal mysteries and a call to conversion To create the kingdom of God among the people of El Salvador and to make our Archdiocese a Church that corresponds to the plan of the eternal mysteries of the Lord --- this is my ministry and the ministry of all my brother priests and catechists and religious and all those who live the reality of the Church and desire nothing else but Jesus Christ, the fullness of time.

The fullness of time is the sacraments which Jesus has given to us in order to share his life with us. The fullness of time is the hope of eternal resurrection that is planted in the

hearts of Christians. The fullness of time is the proclamation that you are going to make within a short time: *Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!* Christ is present from the moment that Saint Paul described: *When the fullness of time arrived, the Word of God was conceived by a woman who gave birth. In this Christ, born of the Virgin of Mary, the mystery hidden for long ages was revealed* (32). To know Christ is to know the only truth of history. Creating true history with God can only be done by those who have incorporated themselves into Christ who is the image of the invisible God and the realization of the eternal hidden mysteries of the Lord.

So you will understand, my dear brothers and sisters, why in the Sunday homily the archbishop is concerned to apply the message of the secret of eternal ages in the concrete reality of history. You can understand then, even though you might not like it, that this eternal light illuminates the evil features of our history and denounces them: *history should not be lived in this way!* On the other hand, those who are laboring well are told: *history should be lived in this way!* Therefore, in light of the God who comes to us at this Christmas time through the beautiful presence of Mary, sign of the fullness of times --- my sisters and brothers, in this light we analyze our reality and we do this with Mary who lived in the best way the reality of our people. Indeed this was Mary's duty: to incarnate Christ in history. Mary becomes a Salvadorian and incarnates Christ in the history of El Salvador. Mary takes on your last name and mine in order to incarnate Christ in your family and mine, in order to incarnate us into the eternal life of the gospel. Mary is identified with the eternal life of the gospel and thus Mary is identified with each one of us in order that Christ might be incarnated in our individual lives. Blessed are we if we make our devotion to Mary revolve around this reality.

Thus the Council warns preachers to be careful so as not to prolong false ideas about devotion to Mary, a type of devotion that at times has been a cause of separation between Catholics and Protestants because some Catholics have made devotion to Mary a form of idolatry (33). True Mariology knows that Mary is not an idol. The only Savior is God, Jesus Christ and Mary is a human instrument, a child of Adam, a daughter of Israel, the incarnation of a people, a sister of our race, who because of her holiness was able to incarnate in history the divine life of God. Therefore, the true homage that Christians should give to the Virgin is to make, like her, every effort to incarnate the life of God into the difficult situation of our passing history.

In order to make this remembrance concrete and in order that you might see the efforts of Church throughout history, we call to mind a celebration that was held at noontime on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December in the dining rooms of monasteries and also held here in our Cathedral. We refer to the proclamation of the Roman Martyrology which points out the liturgical celebrations for each day of the year. On December 24<sup>th</sup>, the lector proclaims in a solemn way: *In the 5199<sup>th</sup> year of the creation of the world, from the time when in the beginning God created heaven and earth; from the flood, the 2957<sup>th</sup> year; from the birth of Abraham, the 2015<sup>th</sup> year; from Moses and the going-out of the people of Israel from Egypt, the 1510<sup>th</sup> year; from the anointing of David as king, the 1032<sup>nd</sup> year; in the 65<sup>th</sup> week according to the prophecy of Daniel; in the 194<sup>th</sup> Olympiad; from the founding of the city of Rome, the 752<sup>nd</sup> year; in the 42<sup>nd</sup> year of the rule of Octavian Augustus, when the whole world was at peace, in the sixth age of the world: Jesus Christ, the eternal God and Son of the eternal Father, desiring to sanctify the world by His most merciful coming, having been conceived by the Holy Ghost, and nine months having passed since His conception, was born in Bethlehem of Judea of the Virgin Mary, having become man.*



What a beautiful synthesis of history! Abraham.. I forgot to mention that David, who is the focus of the first reading, (34) in which God, through the prophet Nathan, tells him that his descendants will form a dynasty that will not end. He is the first link in this line of proclamations concerning Christ as the Messiah and King. When Jesus passes before the blind, the lepers and other persons in need, they cry out in anguish: *Son of David, have pity on us.* (35) From the time of creation, Abraham and David, etc --- Christ comes and gathers together all the history that was read in such a solemn manner in the Martyrology of today --- the day on which someone is born, someone who is not a man like every other man but who from the secrets of the eternal centuries of God takes up all of history.

### **Life of the Church**

As it happens, the final chapter of this history, which is distinct from the history of other people, has been lived by our people during the past week. We have heard that the Pope will come to Puebla on January 27<sup>th</sup>. This announcement has filled us with great joy because now as we travel to Puebla we will meet the Pope and be able to show him the pastoral ministry that we have undertaken. In his Christmas greeting the Pope used a phrase that we understand very well in our present situation: *there can be no peace in those places where human rights are infringed*<sup>3</sup>. The Pope, who seeks this peace, has sent a mediator to resolve the conflict between Argentina and Chile<sup>4</sup>.

The Archbishop of Managua has also expressed his pastoral concern in this matter of peace.<sup>5</sup> You have read about this in *La Prensa* and we want to take advantage of this present moment to express once again our solidarity with the Archdiocese and the hierarchy of Nicaragua. We are with them and live the reality that they are living. For those who are Christian everything that is human is a part of their own lives.

Visiting our communities also gives an idea of the history of our Church. Last Sunday in Colegio Guadalupano about one thousand Catholics who are members of the Base Communities of Faith and other lay movements celebrated a Christmas gathering. They wrote a statement<sup>6</sup> in which they committed themselves to continue to work in this ministry of our Church, that is, they committed themselves to continue to form small groups where people are able to reflect more profoundly on the Scriptures. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to tell all those who are members of these groups or who try to form these groups that if someone holds these groups as suspect, they are gravely mistaken. They are simply cells of the Church, Base Communities of Faith who live their faith in a more intimate and familiar way and who reflect on the gospel. All of this leads them to the celebration of the Eucharist and the other sacraments.

Following this line of thought I want to thank the editor of *Orientación* for the commentary that was published concerning our Pastoral Instruction on the Sacraments: *Restructuring the sacramental life of the Church gives people the ability to be salt, light and leaven ... Many people have reduced the sacraments to mere rites or ceremonies and they have prostituted the sacraments. Others have understood our efforts at deepening their awareness but have separated themselves from these celebrations and therefore run the risk of being unknown as Christians and losing their identity.*<sup>7</sup> In the present edition of *Orientación* part of the Instruction is published and what is stated here as a commentary is exactly what I hope to accomplish: we are not saying that biblical reflection is more important than the sacraments or that the sacraments are more important than biblical reflection --- both are necessary and should be united as one. Through biblical reflection we

discover the meaning of the sacraments and the sacraments then become celebrations of life and faith which we profess --- thus the celebration of the sacrament is based on Scripture. The Bible without sacraments would be Protestantism and the sacraments without the Bible would be what many of us have had: rites that have lost their meaning. Thanks to God that in the communities that I have mentioned, people are attempting to respect this oneness of the Word of God and the sacramental life of the Church.

Last Sunday we were in Rosario de Mora where we celebrated Confirmation and First Communion. In the evening we were in the parish of San Sebastián, Ciudad Delgado, where Father Juan Antonio Gutiérrez was installed as the new pastor. We had the opportunity to participate in their sacramental life and their reflections.

We were in La Vega where they have a beautiful tradition of honoring the Virgin of the Redeemed. We celebrated this devotion with them and as we said today, this devotion draws the Christian community closer to the love of Mary as we approach the celebration of Christmas. I thanked the chaplain, Father Raúl Flores, for having invited me and enabling me to participate in this beautiful celebration. I was able to do the same with Father Roberto Crespín who invited me to another celebration of the Virgin of the Redeemed in Cantón de San Laureano, Ciudad Delgado.

I went to San José Guayabal where the people were concluding their reflections in preparation for Christmas. I experienced this as a tremendous grace since I was able to celebrate their patronal feast which was celebrated today and which is also celebrated by the people in Quezaltepeque. This feast of Saint Joseph is celebrated during this Advent/Christmas season.

We had a very wonderful visit with the people who live in the remote town of Potonico. There I presided at the rite of atonement in light of the fact that the hosts had been stolen. I was pleased to be able to celebrate this rite. When I arrived in the town a group of children were presented to me --- these children had formed a Committee of Solidarity with the orphaned children of Chalatenango. They said that they had formed this group to express their solidarity with those children whose parents have been assassinated, disappeared or who are political prisoners. They are aware of the fact that thousands of children are living in situations of misery and malnourishment and anxiety because they know that their parents might be imprisoned and perhaps forced to endure torture or might even be imprisoned underground. I received a beautiful letter and I cannot read it in its entirety but they told me about their feelings when they had been taught that the suffering of others should be seen as a reality that is also theirs. They felt that it was impossible to celebrate Christmas as a family and forget the anguish and anxiety of so many other families. I want to let them know here that the visit which they wish to make to my office has been granted to them and they are able to come at the day and time that I have given to them. I also greeted the Assumption Sisters and the new pastor of Potonico, Father Luis Recinos, and thanked them for the great pastoral ministry that they are trying to develop.

I was in the community of Soyapango where I administered the sacraments of Confirmation, First Communion and Matrimony.

I was also greatly comforted by the visit to the Asilo Sara where I was able to spend some time with the elderly and the infirm. I was able to see the work of the director and many people who collaborate in this work. I was very surprised and pleased to see the efforts that

many young students made in this collaborative ministry --- there were many young women from the Sacred Heart Society, the Society of the Holy Family and from the Salvadorian School. This scene led me to extend a call to these young people and let them know that it is in this way that one lives out the Christian commitment: pushing the wheel chairs of the elderly and infirm. What a beautiful gesture on the part of these young people to minister in the midst of an elderly community that needs them! Like the children of Chalatenango, may this be a call to all young people to commit themselves to these charitable acts that our religion promotes.

Yesterday, with the Franciscan Sisters, we celebrated fifty years of their ministry in our country. How beautiful was the Church of our Lady of Fatima in Los Planes de Renderos. The Superior General of this Mexican community, four Provincials and more than three hundred Sisters filled the Church. How God has blessed them with vocations! I asked them to continue to be faithful to their vocation and charism and to try to adapt their ministry to the ministry of the local Church because it is in this way that they are able to demonstrate their fidelity to their vocation. They should not shield themselves from or separate themselves from their pastor but fully commit themselves to the pastoral concerns and the needs of our people. How beautiful to be able to rely on this group of Franciscans who, without betraying their charism, are working and serving people who need them so much.

Today at 11:00am we will be in Amatepec and at 4:00pm in Colonia Bernal where we will celebrate Christmas.

We will also celebrate the feast of Christmas here in the Cathedral at 7:00pm and our celebration for the New Year will take place on December 31<sup>st</sup> at the same time. Make every effort to make holy this blessed night when Jesus was born of Mary.

I want to fully support the campaign that you have heard about in the media --- a campaign on behalf of Caritas. For many people Caritas has a bad connotation because it has broken down as a result of negligence and a lack of concern and perhaps even because of our sins. But we want to rediscover the meaning of the beautiful image of the word *charity*. Charity means love and we want to give to our archdiocesan organization *Caritas* a sense of the true school of charity and love. We are not going to wait for gifts to come to us from the United States nor are we going to be content with the simple distribution of goods. Rather we are going to be concerned with fulfilling the words that form the motto of this organization: *Let each one give what they can and let everyone give something!* Sometimes a simple smile can be a valiant collaboration in this work of love. Today in the Cathedral there will be a second collection which will be given to *Caritas*. The people who are in charge of this work are present and I exhort you to collaborate with them. The same collection is being taken up in all the parishes and communities. I ask those communities that are listening to me on radio, to designate someone to take up the collection, even if this is just a small amount, and then to send the money to *Caritas*. I am not trying to impose something here but simply extending to you an invitation: *Let each one give what they can and let everyone give something!*

### **Events of the week**

I also want to speak to you concerning the problem at the University, a problem which all of you are aware of. The abolishment of CAPUES and the decree of the Legislative Assembly<sup>8</sup> is an attempt to normalize the life and the activity of the alma mater of El

Salvador and this has given us much hope. These actions have given this complicated problem a breath of fresh air, a breath of Christmas air. We want to take as our own the concerns of all those individuals who desire to commit themselves to work within the norms recently decreed by the Legislative Assembly and restore to this center of higher education its character as a center of culture. We hope that all of this will be done with a sense of the common good and with a high academic spirit. The spirit of the recent decree of the Legislative Assembly clearly shows that this problem has to be resolved by the members of this institution: students and professors. The time has arrived to work toward that which we all desire. This is not the time for revenge or demagoguery or manipulations that might upset the forward march of the gestures that have been made in order to resolve this difficult situation. True peace is shaped by people of good will. It is clear that neither the professors nor the students nor the University alone can solve a problem that is a problem for the whole country. Professors and students ought to come together and ask for the wider participation of the many other sectors of our nation. We believe that the solution is found in dialogue with all the groups of our nation. We also ask people to keep in mind that it is not the number of persons who participate but the quality of these persons that should be taken into consideration at this moment of great responsibility. Do not torpedo the gestures of normalization with obdurate and demagogic criteria of massive participation. I am sure that the Church and other institutions of this country want to collaborate in illuminating the paths for a solution. Since this problem is a national problem, the members of the University have an obligation to give a voice to these institutions and persons. As pastor of the Church our support will always be extended, but extended within the boundaries of honesty and loyalty and justice. For this reason we also state that we will raise our voice clearly when the common good is ignored in these procedures.

We were invited to participate in the swearing-in ceremony of the new leaders of the Conferencia Unitaria de Trabajadores Salvadoreños. In light of this we want to reaffirm our position of being present to the workers with our evangelical mission. We say to all workers that the Church supports your just demands in the same way that she rejects all the abuses against the dignity, the freedom and the rights of the workers.

You know that there is a radio program *La X en la Cosecha*, where we have read many denunciations that have been directed toward the Ministry of Works. We want to place this program at the service of the workers. This program can be heard every Thursday at 5:30pm. We want to say that at this Christmas time we are greatly concerned about the situation of so many *campesinos*. When the poor have no place to rest their bodies, when their children are seeking refuge from the cold and find nothing more than improvised hammocks strung up in fields and coffee groves, we must remember that the Good News of the Savior is for everyone: the joy of the Lord who has created us to accomplish his salvation --- this joy is for everyone.

The Human Rights Commission of El Salvador has visited once again the prisoner Isabel Rodríguez Barrera. He has been hospitalized in El Hospital Rosales and as we have said before there is no judicial case against him and yet for more than one hundred days his freedom has been restricted. It is feared that he is going to be taken out of the hospital during this Christmas season. He is always being guarded by police detectives.

On Thursday, December 21<sup>st</sup>, Father Carlos Stetter<sup>9</sup> was expelled from Guatemala. He has been sent to our country and was handed over to the authorities of our government. The

same situation is repeated over and over again: from Guatemala to El Salvador, from El Salvador to Guatemala ... What agreements exist between these nations?

This week, two exiles have left for Venezuela. Reynaldo Cruz Menjívar and Vinicio Avalos had been staying at our embassy. We have previously spoken about the case of Menjívar and we are happy that he is now out of danger.

We are saddened by the death of two vigilantes of Y.S.U. and this is also painful for their families. Also on Thursday night, December 21<sup>st</sup>, the military authorities arrested two reporters from this radio station. The statement of the reporters refers to this action as *arbitrary*. Then they go on to say that they were treated like pawns by the police<sup>10</sup>. I am happy that the reporters have courageously denounced the abuse of authority against one of their colleagues. Now they can understand why a pastor denounces situations when the rights of a *campesino* are violated. Hopefully the same eloquence and watchfulness that the media employed when the rights of a reporter were abused will be applied to our *campesinos* when they demand justice.

A bulletin entitled *El Testimonio de un Desaparecido* (The Testimony of one who has disappeared) was presented to our Secretariat of the Means of Communication. This bulletin contains the statements of Francisco Baltazar Campos Mendoza, an ex-political prisoner who sought asylum in the Mexican Embassy. He spoke about the tortures and interrogations as well as the other prisoners with whom he was able to speak. He also spoke about the way he was able to escape. Those persons who would like a copy of this bulletin can obtain it in the Chancery.<sup>11</sup>

The intention for this Mass on Christmas Eve was offered by the mothers of those persons who have disappeared. Thus we offer this Mass for all those persons who have disappeared or been abducted. Once again we also express our solidarity with all those who suffer and call out to those who can still make this a Christmas with no political prisoners or abductions. Concerning the four persons who have been abducted --- the two Englishmen, a man from Japan and another from Holland --- they are still unable to return to their homes. I repeat here that the Commission wishes to mediate this situation. They asked for a meeting with the President but this has been denied. We have proof of this by a document that was signed by four members of the Commission. Therefore in light of the impossibilities that confront the Commission and the family members of those who have been abducted and the companies that represent these men, we want to say that the government has a responsibility to provide to those who have abducted these men information concerning the five political prisoners that they have asked for: Lil Milagro Ramírez, Carlos Madriz, Jorge Luis Selayandía, Gonzalo Parada, Sonía Estela Ramírez. The Commission wants to do more and the families of these men would do anything to rescue their loved ones. We hope that the government will provide this information because this is a condition that cannot be fulfilled by the family members. Those who have these men under their control --- we beg you to return them through negotiations that that can be accomplished by their family members or the companies they work for or the members of the Commission who are willing to help in any way that is possible.

Besides these four persons who have been abducted we are also concerned about the 108 persons who have disappeared and the 72 political prisoners.<sup>12</sup> Many are in the prisons at Gotera. Many others have been exiled and many *campesinos* are now sleeping in the mountains. In light of this situation we want to say that we have continually raised our voices

to those who are responsible and to those who can make it possible that we celebrate a Christmas without political prisoners and without abductions. There is still time.

I also want to ask you to pray for Alejandro Quinteros, also known as El Apache. Because of his police record and the torture that he has endured his name is well known. One of our newspapers has reported that he died of a cerebral hemorrhage and another that he died of a heart attack and was found bent over the steering-wheel of his car.<sup>13</sup> We ask that God might pardon him because the Church denounces individuals and their actions only because she seeks the conversion and the salvation of these people --- even if these people are cruel and have gratuitously declared themselves to be enemies of the Church.

Thanks to God we can conclude with a note of joy and optimism and see some ways in which Christmas has inspired people to do good. On Sunday December 14<sup>th</sup><sup>14</sup>, the Society of Television and Radio Artists and Reporters presented a show in El Teatro Libertad to benefit the burn victims at El Hospital Rosales. We have also been informed that many choirs and students have visited those who are suffering and infirm and imprisoned. Blessed be God for the goodness that is in the hearts of the people of El Salvador. We want to remind you of the words of the Council: *Do not give as alms what is due in justice.*(36) Before providing charity and distributing gifts and piñatas, etc., let us examine our work on behalf of social justice for there can be no Christmas peace if the relationships of the people of El Salvador are not based on true justice. This is the peace that we desire. From this perspective of peace founded on justice, I say warmly to all of you: Happy Christmas!

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<sup>1</sup> See St. Bernard, *Homilies on the excellence of the Virgin Mother*, 4,8: PL 183, 78.

<sup>2</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, III, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Discourse of John Paul II to the Cardinals and Prelates of the Roman Curia (22 December 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 December 1978.

<sup>4</sup> See *L'Osservatore Romano*, 31 December 1978.

<sup>5</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 18 December 1978.

<sup>6</sup> See Comunicado del primer encuentro arquidiocesano de comunidades eclesiales de base y movimientos laicales, *Orientación*, 24 December 1978.

<sup>7</sup> "La instruction pastoral de Monseñor", *Orientación*, 24 December 1978.

<sup>8</sup> See Decree n° 108 of the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of El Salvador, of 16 December 1978, *ECA* 363/364 (1979), pp. 92-99.

<sup>9</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 22 December 1978.

<sup>10</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 23 December 1978.

<sup>11</sup> See *Orientación*, 17 December 1978.

<sup>12</sup> The list of names of the disappeared and political prisoners was published in *Orientación*, 24 December 1978.

<sup>13</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 21 December 1978, and *El Diario de Hoy*, 23 December 1978.

<sup>14</sup> Thursday 14 December. See *Diario de Hoy*, 22 December 1978.

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*Marginal References* (1) Lk 1,28-29; (2) Rm 16,25; (3) Rm 16,22.27; (4) Rm 16,27; (5) Gn 1,3-27; (6) Gn 1,28-29; (7) DV 3; (8) DV 3; (9) Ac 17,30; (10) DV 3; (11) DV 3; (12) Gn 1,26; (13) Ex 20,3; (14) DV 3; (15) LG 55; (16) LG 55; (17) LG 55; (18) Is 7,14; (19) Lk 1,37; (20) Lk 1,35-37; (21) LG 55; (22) LG 55; (23) Qo 3,4; (24) Gn 1,14; (25) Lk 1,38; (26) GS 13; (27) Jn 15,6; (28) Lk 1,38; (29) GS 22; (30) Mt 18,18-20; (31) Mk 16,16; (32) Rm 16,25; (33) LG 67; (34) 2S 7,16; (35) Mk 10,47; (36) AA 8.