

THE FAMILY: REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE

Sunday in the Octave of Christmas
Feast of the Holy Family
December 31, 1978

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:22-40

My beloved sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience.

Happy New Year! These words which are exchanged between people today are also profoundly proclaimed by the Church because liturgically we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family and therefore I am reminded of the thought that was expressed by the Second Vatican Council when they focused on the problem of the family and the well-being of people and society: *The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family* (1).

To exchange best wishes at this time of the year --- Happy New Year! --- is to express our profound desire that all people enjoy the root of this happiness, the healthy condition produced by marriage and family. We are all members of a family and the well-being of the family provides well-being to individuals. When we leave the Eucharistic celebration people are happy because they can say: *I am going home!* To have a home, a place that we call home, is a source of happiness and joy. Jesus had a family and desired to begin the redemption of humankind by becoming a member of a family.

During the Christmas season that began on December 25th and that will continue until Sunday, January 6th, the mystery that the Church wishes to highlight is the following: God has come! God is with us! Emmanuel means God-with-us. (2) Christmas is the mystery of God visiting humankind but here we are not speaking about the visit of a person who comes and then returns to where he came from. Indeed, God remains with us! The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! The Word became incarnated, flesh! We have already spoken about the meaning of this Biblical word: the *Word*, who became a companion to all human life and became a member of every family, a child of every home. He has every right to enter in and feel that he is a member of our family, a member of the family living in the most humble of dwellings and a member of the family living in elegant surroundings. He will enter if we have not worshiped false gods. Wherever the door is opened, he has every right to enter.

The revelation, the epiphany, of the coming of God begins in the family setting. Having recently celebrated Christmas, the feast of the Holy Family tells us that God became man in order to save all people and he wants to reveal himself as a member of a family. Thus Joseph and Mary are inseparable members of his family. From the time of his birth Jesus is not spoken about without some reference to Mary and as long as Joseph lived, Jesus accompanied and traveled with him. When Jesus began his public ministry, it appears that Joseph had died but Jesus always appears united with his most holy mother. Jesus had a

home, a family. Thus the theme of today's homily on the feast of the Holy Family is: the family: the revelation of God's love. The word *epiphany* means revelation or making something clear. In this case, God wishes to reveal where he lives. God wishes to reveal himself to society, history and the world. Thus every Christian family ought to be an epiphany, a revelation of God and God's love. A man and a woman do not marry one another just so that they alone can be happy. Rather they have a profound social function to make God present in the world and in their marital love and later, when they have children, in their sons and daughters. This union of the family in love should be a revelation of God.

This morning, from the perspective of Nazareth, let us look at this revelation of God in the family. Soon after Paul VI was elected Pope he traveled to the Holy Land and during one of his pilgrimages he went to the house in Nazareth and proclaimed a beautiful homily in which he spoke about feeling like someone who was at home: *If only we would become a child again and live in the company of this family in order to learn the meaning of silence, duty, work and family.*¹ Today we can actualize that pilgrimage of Paul VI and through the celebration of the Word and the liturgy of the Holy Family we can experience ourselves as members of that family, children of Mary, the mother of Jesus and our Mother. We can also experience the protection of the powerful and yet tender, manly and firm hands of Joseph. But above all we can experience ourselves as brothers and sisters, intimate confidants of the great brother of humanity, Jesus. Therefore, as usual I will develop this homily with three ideas: one; the human dimension of the family; two; the religious and ecclesial transcendence of every family; three; Christ lives and reveals himself to the world in the setting of a family.

The human dimension of the family

The conclusion of today's gospel presents us with the human dimension of the family: *they returned to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew.* (3). What a simple life The life of two *campesinos* who have a child: Joseph works to sustain his family and Mary does her daily chores in the home. Still located in Nazareth is the fountain, the only fountain that existed in the town. Mary goes there with her jug to bring water to her house which in turn she will use to mix the flour. All of the beautiful parables of the woman in her home were lived by Jesus in the simple home of Nazareth. *The child grew.*

In today's first reading we are presented with a summary of the Old Testament wisdom, a summary that was perhaps composed by a rabbi who was possibly a diplomat in the royal court but who later returned and gathered together this wisdom in the famous book of Sirach: (4) *the Lord honors a father above his children and he confirms a mother's right over her children ... help your father in his old age, even if his mind fails and do not grieve him as long as he lives.* Even though your father is older and his mind is failing, respect him. The first reading speaks about the human satisfaction of those who honor their father and mother: *Those who honor their father will have joy in their own children* (5). Naturally one who is a good son or daughter will also be a good parent. *Those who respect their father will have a long life* (6). The Old Testament did not know (like we who are Christian) the rewards of eternal life with God but rather speaks about an earthly happiness and therefore great satisfaction was found in the joys of this world. But when we reflect on this human dimension, we come to understand that we are not talking about some mystery but rather are referring to the human heart which by nature manifests love and respect which inundates family life.

Today's second reading, taken from the writings of Saint Paul, looks at the human dimension of the family and says: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience* (7). These are simple treasures and perhaps, like the coins that we hold in our hand because we use them so frequently, the image on the coin becomes worn off and therefore we do not give them the same value. Yet how beautiful is the simple life lived out in its human element, the family. It is for this reason that the Council states that *the family is a kind of school of deeper humanity* (8). When the parents of John XXIII celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their marriage, he was the Apostolic Delegate in the East and a letter of his has been preserved --- a letter that he wrote with great tenderness to his elderly *campesino* parents: *I left your house a long time ago. I have studied in many different schools; I have read many books; but in no place have I learned what I learned from you.*² *The wisdom of the home is a kind of school of deeper humanity.* We can understand why John XXIII was the man he was: a man educated in the school of his own home. The Council states: *Various generations come together in the family* (9). Look at the scene that today's celebration presents to us: the child Jesus, Mary, Joseph, young people, the elderly couple, Simeon and Anna. Doesn't this give us an idea about the human family --- grandchildren, children, parents, grandparents, many generations living together in one home? There is no place for conflict among generations when there is love.

My dear sisters and brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this human concept that the bishops spoke about when they gathered together in Medellin. It was necessary that the Second Vatican Council be made concrete for Latin America and this occurred in Medellin. We spoke about family life in Latin America and the documents of Medellin present us with a beautiful synthesis when they use three phrases: *formation of personalities, education in the faith, promotion of development* (10). I believe that this document has put into focus the great value of family life.

We have been reflecting on the human aspect of the family and the first thing that we notice in a man or a woman is their personality. Before becoming Christian, we must become more human. Perhaps we have inauthentic men and women because we have built the Christian elements on inauthentic human foundations. The pious individual is an inauthentic Christian who is also an inauthentic human being. Many people who defend religion are not human and even less Christian. I laugh at these defenses of religion that are made by interested persons who call themselves authentic Christians. What right do these people have to call themselves authentic Catholics? These individuals often do not understand what it means to adore the true God and instead bow and kneel before the idols of this world.

The human family has to form persons, personalities. Medellin states: *the presence and influence of the distinct and complementary masculine and feminine models of the parents, the bond of mutual affection, the atmosphere of trust, intimacy, respect and freedom which permeates the social framework governed by a natural hierarchy, all these elements enable the family to mold strong and balanced personalities for society* (11). My dear friends, take up the great message of Christmas that is given to you. How we long for fathers to become like Joseph! How we long for mothers to become like Mary and how we long for children to become like Jesus! How we long to have people like Joseph, Mary and Jesus who do not bend before flattery or threats, who know how to say like Jesus: *my food is to do the will of him who sent me* (12), and who live human values.

When the bishops spoke about the promotion of development they stated: *The family is a kind of school of deeper humanity and the fullest humanism is integral development. The family is the foundation of society. In it the various generations come together and help one another to grow wiser and to harmonize personal rights with the other requirements of social life. There, in an atmosphere of love, children can more easily learn the true structure of reality. There, too, tested forms of human culture impress themselves upon the mind of developing adolescent in a kind of automatic way. In the family parents have the task of training their children from childhood to recognize God's love for all men* (13). If everything has a social function in the world, the family has great value. My dear sisters and brothers, we need families like the family at Nazareth so that we might have people here in El Salvador who are authentic men and women, who are persons that one can trust, who are truly new men and women, who promote a new world, who do not allow themselves to be guided by a putrid system, who do not bend before bribes, who do not sell themselves, who are above seeking their own advantage and who are aware of the value of the human person. This is the human dimension of the family and work relationships --- this is the human dimension of all human groups.

Saint Paul continues his letter and in the following verses speaks to us about family relationships: *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children or they may lose heart* (14). Family extends even further. In Saint Paul's time there were servants (slaves) and masters that today we might translate with other words that express the same idea: *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward* (15). Saint Paul tells the servants that they are also heirs and so he speaks today to the workers, to those who are employed by someone else: *You also have a dignity! You will receive an inheritance of justice because you, like your employers, have the same Lord*). Saint Paul concludes this passage with the words: *the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done and there is no partiality* (16). Before God the recommendation of Mr. so-and-so has no value. What is of value is the justice that Mr. so-and-so showed toward another person who is his brother and/or sister. *Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly for you know that you also have a Master in heaven* (17). These human principles give us courage for it is as though these principles were the cradle that destroyed the relationship between masters and servants and yet continued to be a cradle in which all injustice and disorder disappeared. Thus we have a great principle: *There is no partiality in God* (18). Masters also have a Lord before whom they must render an account of their actions. Servants, obey and do not seek out rebellion for the sake of rebellion. We have a judge who demands social justice from men and women. This is the human dimension of the family and of labour relations and of all that makes a human group.

The religious and ecclesial transcendence of the family

Now we will focus on another aspect that in a certain sense is of greater interest to us for this reflection: the religious and ecclesial dimension of the family.

Let us look at the scene that is presented to us: Jesus is in the arms of his mother who is accompanied and protected by her husband as they go to the Temple to fulfill a rite. As the new born child is brought to the Temple, an offering must be made in the name of child and

this offering is made to God as a holocaust. The offering consisted of two turtledoves or two young pigeons, if the family was poor. One of the pigeons was offered as a sacrifice for sins and the other was offered as an act of thanksgiving. Two pigeons --- this was the offering of the poor family of Jesus. The Lord receives the homage of the family because the family has a religious significance.

In the first reading we see how family relationships are not established simply to provide counsel or advice to different members of the family. A reason is always provided: *those who honor their father atone for sins; those who honor their father will have joy in their own children and when they pray they will be heard; honor your father by word and deed that his blessing may come upon you.* In other words in the home there is a true worship of God. The gesture of Mary and Joseph with regard to their child has a religious dimension and thus they make the offering prescribed by Moses. Every day and at every time the same occurs in every family.

It is beautiful to see a child obey his/her parents especially when that child is an adult --- a man obeys another man because that person is his father or his mother. How sacred is the word of obedience when it is spoken by a human being. This word has authority, divine authority because it is the command of a human being --- perhaps the command of a *campesino* to his son who is possibly a professional and this professional, with total veneration, respects his father. Though the son might know more than his *campesino* father, nevertheless he also knows that the authority of his father comes from God. The father also knows that the son has a life that was given to him by God that must be respected --- there is a religious significance here, a sense of worship.

People know that they are members of a family: the husband who is faithful to his wife and does not betray her because betrayal is a sacrilegious act because in the act of betrayal the husband not only betrays his wife but also betrays God. In this way the family relations recover a beautiful significance that is explained by the Council in the following words: *The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent* (20). This is the meaning of marriage: to give oneself to another. *I take you as my lawful husband/wife, to have and to hold* (Rite of Marriage). To give oneself to another and to accept the gift of another is something so sacred that only God, the author of life, can allow and bless.

It is here that the society of the family arises as an institution that is affirmed by divine law. Thus one can say: *What God has joined together, let no one separate* (21). Therefore this society that is approved by God and given a deep religious significance cannot invent laws according to its whim or enter into relationships according to its pleasure. No authority is able to place conditions or impose situations of sin on married people. I want to say this with all the eloquence that I can. In our country the law of God is being abused when instruments are distributed that violate the laws of fidelity and when clinics are established that in the name of the government impose mutilation and sterilization. With what right are these things done when life is a gift of God? What right do married people have to sterilize themselves or use contraceptives if life is a gift of God? Marriage is a society, an institution that God has established and sanctioned. Therefore, agreements that allow governments to receive subsidies from other sources that are used for mutilation betray the law of God. The law of God should not be ridiculed because when it is there are consequences to pay when so many absurd statements are being made against the laws of fertility --- grave consequences that are being experienced in many other parts of the world. It is said that in the United

States they no longer sell pills but send them to Latin America and here the lives of so many women have been ruined.

The law of God ought to regulate human society. The sexual instinct that God has given to women and men should not be played with, should not be used for self-satisfaction as if one were involved in some form of diversion --- this makes the home a house of prostitution. Rather this sexual instinct should lead people to responsible parenthood. Men should know that they have generative abilities and therefore they should use these abilities responsibly. Women should also be aware of the fact that they are able to bear children and they should do this responsibly and not trample on the laws of nature but rather conform themselves to the laws of the Creator.

My dear sisters and brothers, this past week when we celebrated the feast of the Holy Innocents in Antiguo Cuscatlán, I thought: how many innocent children have died today as a result of the abortion laws --- innocent children who were living in the wombs of their mother? The sources of life and married couples have been blinded because they do not understand that the family has been created to reflect the law of God, to reflect tenderness and fertility, so that the children who are born might be able to experience a loving embrace and not be viewed as something that is a disturbance. Since we are talking about the institution of love, may this feast of the Holy Family be a day that cries out for and demands love. May people become worthy of the love which has to be reflected on earth.

In today's readings the family is presented to us with an ecclesial dimension. What does this mean? According to the vision of Saint Paul and his letter to the Colossians the family is a part of the great society of the People of God. With great eloquence Saint Paul tells the Colossian Christian community: *As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved* (22). These are the people who are born into a family. Therefore, the Church is the family of God and if the family unit is the source of the Church then according to Christian law the family does not simply consist of moral and human relationships but also Christian relationships. In the letter to the Colossians, in the passage in which Saint Paul speaks about the Church community and the family community, he often repeats the phrase *in the Lord*. This is a very typical phrase of Saint Paul: *love one another in the Lord; be faithful to one another in the Lord; children obey your parents in everything for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord* (23). In other words, family relationships should be viewed in light of the Church. This is what the Council refers to as the domestic Church (24) where the parents are the first priests who proclaim the Word of God to their children and their children receive the witness of innocence and holiness. When the family is viewed from this perspective we can refer to the family as the domestic Church. *Eclesiola* is a Latin word that refers to a small church, such as the Church in the homes where there is no Roman Pontiff, cardinals, or bishops but only a father and mother and children. But there we have the embryo of the universal Church because in Christ we find all those who have been baptized and all those who are members of the People of God. From the perspective of Jesus' Spirit which has been given to parents and children alike, the individual family members no longer exist for themselves but rather they belong to this unit of the great family of the Church and their laws come from Jesus Christ.

It is here that the phrase used by the bishops in Medellin finds its total realization: education in the faith. Do not forget the three phrases that were spoken by the bishops in Medellin: *formation of personalities, education in the faith, promotion of development* (25). This is the ecclesial dimension: *Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith on behalf of each other, their children and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them ... They*

should imbue their offspring, lovingly welcomed from God, with Christian truths and evangelical virtues. As a result, with their parents leading the way by example and family prayer, children and indeed everyone gathered around the family hearth will find a readier path to human maturity, salvation and holiness (26)

When speaking about the particular difficulties of the family in Latin America (this was the purpose of Medellin, to reflect on the Latin American reality) the bishops state: *We know that many families in Latin America have been incapable of educating in the faith, either because they are not stable or because they have disintegrated, and others because they have imparted this education in purely traditional terms, at times with mythical and superstitious aspects. From this situation springs the necessity of bestowing on today's families the elements which will rebuild their evangelizing capacity in accordance with the doctrine of the Church (27).* I believe that many family situations are reflected in these words. My dear sisters and brothers, I say this with pain and do not want to offend anyone but look at the evil that surrounds us and then let us have the courage to speak the words that were spoken to me by an orphan who had been abandoned by her parents and was about to marry. She said: *I am very careful because I want to give to my children what my parents never gave me.* In this way we have the return of a new humanity. Again I do not speak to offend anyone but if we, as a family, have become disintegrated then let us (and here I speak in a special way to our young women and men) take care to create families that know how to give to their children that which perhaps they never received from their own parents because of the disintegration of the family. I do not speak to offend anyone but I would like to see our nation form more healthy family and ecclesial units. I say this because from the perspective of the Church I see the great deficiencies in our Christianity that Medellin has now defined for us: superstitions, traditionalism, and scandal taken because of the truth preached by the Church. And those who have money even publish those scandals as though they were defending the indefensible: a lie, a falsehood, a lifeless traditionalism, and, much worse, certain economic interests which, lamentably, the Church served. But that was a sin of the Church, deceiving and not telling the truth when it should have.

Today we want to tell people, we want to tell you, my beloved sisters and brothers who perhaps have been deceived: the truth lies here in a faith and a Christianity that adores God and does not give the realities of the earth an absolute value but a relative value. We must educate our children in the truth that springs forth from the gospel and not in poisoned and lifeless traditions. This gospel truth is the truth that I attempt to share with you. Do not distort my words. Do not distort my good intentions of attempting to give a vitality to Christianity, a vitality that I believe is being pointed out by Vatican II and the reflections that were made in Medellin. There are some people who believe that the bishops were mistake when speaking about the family but it is clear that it was necessary for the Church to return to these reflections if she wanted to attempt to strengthen family life. Let us all work together, my sisters and brothers!

I have a letter here (but I do not have time to read the whole letter) from a Colombian who was returning to his country. He wrote: *I greet you. I leave this letter with a friend because I am returning to my homeland. This greeting is from an ex-Catholic who no longer believed in the Church but as I leave now for my native country I feel there is great value in being a Catholic. Pray for me so that this faith that you proclaim and which is accepted by the people might fill me in a way that I have never experienced before.* There are families where the faith is not developed because what is given is traditions poisoned by economic and political interests wrapped up with things of faith. People want a religion that will

merely support those interests and when the Church protests against such selfishness, sins and abuses, then she is seen as departing from the truth. Then these Christians, with their children and everyone else, go away and continue to live traditions that are not true Christian traditions.

Our families must educate their children in the faith but this must be done in way that also gives echo to the many other concerns of young people. A short time ago I had a meeting with some young people who told me: *You do not understand the difficulty of our situation. Our parents tell us that we should not come together for meetings because this is very dangerous and can only cause problems.* I told them that I do not want to cause them problems but simply want them to study the faith that God has given to them as a gift. I invited them to be noble and sincere young men and women. If they encounter the true Christian religion then I asked them to have the courage to follow it or to have the courage to say that they are unable to do so because they do not want to follow half-heartedly. This is the ecclesial dimension of the family.

Jesus lives and reveals himself to the world in the context of a family

The Church has a religious and ecclesial dimension because in her heart this summarizes everything: Christ our Lord lives and reveals himself in the context of a family. How I would like for every family to experience Christ alive in their hearts. Christ is present in the infancy of a child, in the concerns of the adolescent, in the sacred concerns of a father and mother, in the venerable old age of the elderly grandmother or grandfather. Christ is there if he is truly encountered as he appears in today's gospel. It is the same Jesus who redeemed us and wanted to reveal himself in the midst of a specific family. It is Jesus who reveals himself to Simeon and Anna.

Simeon awaited the consolation of Israel and knew that he would not die until he had seen the Christ. When he sees him, he receives him in his arms and proclaims the beautiful prophesy of watchfulness --- remember when we began the season of Advent I said that we must have an attitude of vigilance. In this passage it appears that the watchman is about to sleep because the night is long advanced. Simeon says: *Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word: for my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel* (28). Then directing his eyes toward Joseph and Mary he says: *This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed* (29). The good and the bad who repent through him will receive mercy and pardon. But he will also be the ruin of many because the sinfulness and selfishness and pride of many will reject him. Jesus is a stumbling block. And so, those who reject me do me an immense honor because I somewhat resemble Jesus Christ, who was also a stumbling block. Simeon prophesied that the Church, following Christ, would have to be like him. How beautiful to listen to a letter in which one hears the following words: *I did not grow up in the Church but now I have begun to grow!* My brothers and sisters I experience great joy as I witness so many conversions and I also experience the pain of many people who are obstinate and who like the hypocritical Pharisees, truly reject Jesus, not because of any lack of clarity -- for Jesus spoke quite clearly to them --- but because of the ill-will of their heart which clouds their vision and makes it impossible for them to see anything good in the Lord. This is the sign of Christ.

It was for this reason that the holy elderly man told Mary: *a sword will pierce your own soul* (30). Mothers, and I speak especially to young mothers, what would you say if as you

brought your child for Baptism a prophet told you: *This child is going to have a tragic end!* You would be unable to live with serenity. You would be thinking: *when will this time come about?* Mary lived like this mother, waiting for the hour when this prophecy would be fulfilled, waiting for the sword to pierce her soul. Some people say that the sword could be an experience of humility --- a humble person who feels so small in light of the greatness of the vocation that they have received for it seems as though God might have been mistaken. *Why did the Lord choose me?* Mary felt so small before the greatness of her role as a collaborator in the mystery of the redemption and salvation of humankind and she saw all of this as a sword. At the foot of the cross Mary felt as though not one sword (but as tradition tells us) seven swords pierced her heart as she experienced the suffering of her Son.

Anna, an elderly woman --- and notice that people of every age can proclaim Christ --- announced Jesus to all who were awaiting the liberation of Israel. (31) I imagine this elderly woman leaving the Cathedral after she had seen Jesus enter in the arms of the Virgin and telling the whole world: *The Redeemer has come!* All those who listened to her would be filled with joy. I would hope that we would all be prophets in this sense of the word and proclaim the presence of the Lord.

Life of the Church

Christ is a sign of contradiction and history repeats itself. During our Sunday homily here in the Cathedral we reflect on the reality in light of Gospel, life, and the liturgy. Do not forget that my primary concern is to be a catechist, to teach religion and I have great satisfaction in doing this. Later we enlighten the reality with doctrine. The reality is not the most important but it provides a real framework in which we live the doctrine of the Church. We do this in order that we might understand that our doctrine is pertinent and that today in El Salvador, in the year 1978, the prophecy made concerning Jesus as a sign of contradiction is being fulfilled. Here the People of God continue to be called to be the holy family of Jesus and yet some people pay no heed to this calling. Therefore now I make reference to the concrete realities of our historical week.

In today's *Orientación*³ you can read a summary of the Pope's message for tomorrow's celebration of World Peace. Like last year, the Commission of Justice and Peace in El Salvador is preparing a celebration for later this month during which time we will reflect more deeply on the Pope's message. You can read this message in *Orientación*. The weekly article that I write⁴ also refers to the message of the Holy Father in which he places before us some simple norms on a theme (like Paul VI did). The theme of this year's message is: *To reach peace, teach peace!* The Pope highlights some pedagogical norms for educating people in the ways of peace. It would be good to read this message and attempt to put into practice these norms during the year. If we are not responsible for creating peace in the whole world we are certainly responsible for creating peace in our homes and in our neighborhoods. We are able to say like Saint Francis: *Make me in instrument of peace.*

I want to express my solidarity with the Bishop of Santiago de María, Bishop Rivera. La Escuela del Castaño was searched by members of the National Guard who were looking for arms. The Bishop has protested this action before the Defense Ministry because this school is not a place where people are being trained to use arms but a place that promotes the dignity of the human person of the *campesinos* who go there to attend classes that have been organized for them.

The Archbishop of Managua sent us a letter telling us that he has received the 2,000.00 colones that we sent him, money that was sent thanks to your generosity.

I also ask your prayers for the assignment that is being undertaken in Argentina and Chile by the envoy of the Pope, Cardinal Samoré. As you know these two nations have been in conflict with one another and they have asked the intervention of the Pope, who, as a first step, has sent the Cardinal to investigate the situation.

My sisters and brothers, the assembly of Puebla is very near. Tomorrow is the first of January and on the 27th of January this conference will be inaugurated in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe and presided over by the Pope. This is a General Assembly of the Latin American Bishops. I have the right to participate in this Assembly and there I will represent all of you. They, representatives of the hierarchy, are pondering deeply whethert I go there with voice or with voice and vote⁵. I am not sure what is behind all of this but I want to tell you clearly that I go to Puebla as a member of the Pontifical Commission of Latin America. It is as though the Pope has called me to go as an advisor to this meeting of the Latin American bishops. People have published this news with a sick mind and want to create rivalries but we are not frightened by this. In the gospel Jesus spoke about this when the disciples were speaking about who was more important in the kingdom (32). It is as though the Episcopal Conference of El Salvador is discussing who is more important; who has voice; who has voice and vote? Jesus responded: *these matters are discussed outside by people of the world but among you it must be different, if you want to be great then you must become the least of all* (33). Yes, and people became angry because of the applause given to him. Thank you for your applause.

My sisters and brothers, what interests me is to go to Puebla and even if I do not have the right to vote, I want my voice to be an expression of the Church that you form --- a Church that is alive, a Church of martyrs, a Church that is filled with the Holy Spirit. I want to tell my brother bishops that I am grateful for this Church and I want my voice to echo the concerns of all the communities of the Archdiocese. I also want to tell the bishops that I hope to learn from their experience. I believe that the experiences of so many brothers who are scattered throughout America will enrich me and enable me to serve my beloved Diocese in a better way. For this reason I am going to Puebla, especially in light of the fact that the Pope will also be there. If I could do nothing else I simply want to meet him and give him my hands and tell him: *Holy Father, I am with you! I am in unshakeable solidarity with the Holy See!* This is what Puebla means for me and so my sisters and brothers, let us continue to work for the Church in the way that the Spirit of God and the light of the Gospel impels us.

At this time I also want to share with you some sad news that at the same time is also news that is filled with Easter joy. Our dear brother, Father Rogelio Ponsele who is the pastor of Zacamil --- you might remember that he came here from Belgium to work with us and has been here for many years. In fact, he has given a better part of his life, his enthusiasm and his pastoral experience to us. We have received news of the death of his mother. He was unable to participate in the funeral rites for his mother and I ask all of you to pray for her so that she might experience the joy of Easter because she is a great Christian woman who has given us her son whom she did not have the pleasure of being near her --- for he was here with us, working intensely. Indeed, I believe his pastoral ministry here is the greatest comfort that Father Rogelio can offer and I have sent him the condolences and the

prayers of the whole Archdiocese, especially the people from the Vicariate of Mejicanos where we will soon celebrate a Mass for her eternal rest.

As I have traveled through the communities of the Archdiocese, I tell you once again what I said before: everywhere the Church is alive. In Colonia Amatepec we inaugurated a new chapel and this community is outstanding in their enthusiasm. It was like a real Palm Sunday --- children and adults carried palm branches to greet me and lead me to the place where we blessed the chapel. I greeted Father José Luis and I thanked him for all that he is doing for us. In the afternoon I was Colonia Bernal which is under the care of the Augustinian Community since these people are part of Presentation Parish in Miralvalle. I believe that this community of Bernal, with its youthful enthusiasm, it called to be leaven for a new parish where we are going to venerate the traditional and historical image of the Presentation. This is the first image of Mary that was venerated here in El Salvador, an image that was saved from a fire in the Church of San José.

I celebrated Christmas Day by administering the sacraments and I am grateful for this new pastoral approach to the sacraments that prepares Christians to be more aware of the actions that they are celebrating. This is occurring everywhere. In Soyapango I administered First Communion and Matrimony and in the afternoon I was in Huizúcar where forty couples were married and a good number of First Communions.

On the 26th, a group of children from the communities of Chalatenango visited me. They have formed a Solidarity Committee and it is impressive to listen to these children speak about solidarity with their peers, many of whom they do not know and many of them have also been orphaned. On this Christmas Day these orphans are unable to receive the embrace of their fathers because they have been killed or imprisoned or have disappeared. During their visit they told me something that was very impressive: *When we are close to you we feel that you are our father!* With all of my human limitations I know that this is not so but sharing with them the Church's great love I know they are not orphans. May the whole Church shelter them and accompany all those who suffer.

On the 27th, feast of Saint John the Evangelist, we celebrated the patronal feast in the community of San Juan Opico where we gave a warm greeting to Msgr. José María Dueñas, the Vicar General of Santiago de María and a native of the community of Opico where he was ordained a priest fifty years ago by his uncle, the Bishop of San Miguel, Bishop Dueñas. We spoke about our recollections of this unforgettable bishop and shared our memories about another bishop, my dear friend and brother, Bishop Valladares. We met with the catechists and were able to experience the vitality of this community. In the Basilica we raised to the diaconate a young man, Jaime Paredes, who has completed his studies. We hope that soon he will be ordained a priest and be a good priest.

On the feast of the Holy Innocents we were in Antiguo Cuscatlán where there was the typical procession of the children which was followed by the celebration of the Mass. We proclaimed a message about respect for life and solidarity with the innocent ones of our time. The innocent children who have died now rejoice in the glory of heaven, not because of their personal merits but because of their solidarity with Christ the Redeemer. Today was also the one month anniversary of the assassination of Father Ernesto Barrera and the other workers who were assassinated with him. We had several hours of reflection and then we celebrated Mass with the workers. I again told the workers that the Church would not abandon them and that the Church would continue to do all that is possible in order to communicate an

authentic, priestly, and ecclesial message to the working class who are worthy of our respect and kindness. The workers! There was a meeting of the Cooperativa Sacerdotal in the Seminary and there we experienced a true unity and fraternity.

Yesterday, I participated in a gathering of young people in San Antonio Abad. It was very comforting to see more than sixty young people giving reports about their pastoral ministry and dialoging with one another about their concerns. In El Colegio de Belén we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the death of founder of the Congregation of the Carmelites of Saint Joseph: Mother Clarita Quiroz. The present members of the community give honor to the charism of their foundation. In Santa Tecla, the priests, religious and laity of the Vicariate had a meeting to do some planning for the coming year.

This evening at 7:00pm we will celebrate Mass here in the Cathedral with the intention of giving thanks to God for the blessings that we have received during the past year, to ask pardon of those whom we have offended and to ask for strength for the coming year. I want to invite you to participate in the Eucharistic Adoration which will continue until 10:00pm in El Hospital de la Divina Providencia. At 10:00pm we will have a prayer service to give thanks to God and to make amends for the ways in which we have offended God.

On Thursday, the 4th of January we will be in Canton La Junta, the parish of Concepción, Quezaltepeque, where we will offer prayers of atonement for the robbery of the Blessed Sacrament that occurred there. Next Sunday at 5:00pm we install the new pastor in Mejicanos and at 6:00pm we will celebrate the patronal feast of Holy Family Parish in Colonia Centro América.

I received some other sad news in a telegram that advised me of the death a good friend from Alegría, Ricardo Hernández. If you knew the story of Ricardo Hernández you would be deeply moved. He spent thirty years in bed, paralyzed, and each day his condition grew worse but he was always optimistic and had a clear mind. Even though he was blind he was concerned about the work on his farm and offered his pain and suffering for all those who asked for his prayers. As the Bishop of Santiago de María I was greatly comforted when I would ask him to pray for me and he would respond: *You are always in my prayers!* The Lord has given him eternal rest and comfort to his family for having spent these past thirty years living with a saint in their home.

Events of the week

I am sure that all of you are interested in some of the national news. Another abduction occurred and this time Dr. Manuel Antonio Bonilla⁶ was abducted and we make the same plea as always: restore this man to freedom and respect his life. We want his family to know that the Church is in solidarity with their suffering and pain and once again we raise our voice so that calmness and serenity might once again be restored to his home.

With great joy I am able to communicate to you that last night, at 10:00pm we were able to listen to the statement that FARN has asked to be broadcast. This statement was transmitted on the Dutch radio system. Even though here in El Salvador this statement was not published or broadcast, nevertheless it was read in Holland for all of Latin America to hear. We were able to hear the broadcast very clearly and a few minutes after the conclusion of the broadcast we received a telephone call and were told that Mr. Schuiteman, who had been abducted, was now free. Thanks be to God that his freedom has been restored.

On the other hand, the situation of the two Englishmen⁷ and the man from Japan⁸ continues to be the same. Concerning the Englishmen, you heard yesterday at noontime on the radio that the request of the Human Rights Commission was heard and time for negotiations has been prolonged. A request has been made for the participation of the Archbishop in the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission has asked for my consent and with pleasure I have assured them of my collaboration. Indeed, I am always willing to be of service on behalf of the cause of freedom and life and human rights. Together with the other members: Dr. Roberto Lara Velado, Dr. José Napoleón González (Director of *La Crónica*), Dr. Julio Cesar Oliva and Dr. Fernando Augusto Méndez, we are offering our services not only on behalf of the freedom of the Englishmen but also on behalf of the other two people who have been abducted and on behalf of all those who are suffering as the result of unjust imprisonment. On my part I ask for flexibility during these negotiations. We are dealing with lives that are in danger and hopefully those who are responsible for these actions will quickly come to the conclusion that will bring peace and comfort to these families. The Commission can do nothing more but offer their services of mediation to the parties involved in these matters.

I want to tell everyone that these situations of violence do nothing but affirm my proposals and ideals that are outlined in my Pastoral Letter. Above all else I want to remind you about certain uncompromising individuals and institutions and other actual circumstances that provide a tragic realism to the teaching that is proclaimed in the Pastoral Letter: *a government ought to use all its moral and coercive power to guarantee a truly democratic state, one based on a just economic order, in which justice, peace, and the exercise of every citizen's fundamental rights are defended.* Governments will make this reality --- and here I am quoting from the *L'Osservatore Romano* which is the official newspaper of the Holy See --- *more hypothetical and unreal as groups and individuals have recourse to violence and justify their actions because of the existence of tyrannical regimes which instead of reaffirming and promoting the laws and institutions and government infringe upon the fundamental freedoms and the other rights of the human person, reducing citizens to the condition of oppressed persons*⁹. In other words, *L'Osservatore Romano* is saying if unjust violence is being inflicted on innocent and defenseless people, such as we are experiencing today with regard to the many cases of abductions, then the government has to examine the causes of this violence and eliminate the excuses that allow this violence to continue.

How long has it been since we have asked for amnesty and freedom for political prisoners? At the present time I have before me the demands and the pleas of prisoners from Gotera who have received no medical assistance. They are not criminal prisoners but political prisoners who are in a separate section in the prison at Gotera and suffering from true loneliness. There is a doctor there who is finishing his studies and the other day a friend went to see him and asked: *What do you need?* Can you imagine what he asked for: *a mat?* A mat is everything for a prisoner: a place to eat and sleep and sit --- and yes, these prisoners do not even have a mat! The case against these prisoners has not been presented before the courts and so it is necessary that these cases be clarified promptly so that we no longer have this situation where prisoners make such simple requests and then are denied their request. We earnestly desire to eliminate the excuses that have been used by those who have created institutionalized violence in our nation so that other forms of violence do not gain entrance into our society. Therefore returning to the cases of those who have been abducted, we hope that they and our political prisoners and all those who have disappeared will hear good news --- good news for them and for their families.

I was saddened by the death threats that were made against a dear friend, Dr. Roberto Lara Velado. He is well known and you heard him speak here earlier this month when we celebrated the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As a member of the previous commission as well as the present one, he has worked on behalf of those who have been abducted. It is not just that someone who works on behalf of those who have disappeared should be rewarded with these types of threats. What is the origin of these threats? We must end this game because we are living in an atmosphere of psychological warfare based on telephone calls and warnings and rumors that result in distress and anxiety and a lack of peace.

We have received other denunciations that involved matters of labor relations. We have been informed about the case of union workers who have not received their bonuses. Also many cases that involved workers who are harvesting our crops are denounced on our radio program *La X de la Cosecha* on Thursday at 5:00pm.

I want to say a few words here about the problem at the University and express our solidarity. We ask that they seek just means to resolve this situation, means that allows everyone involved to participate. If the lack of participation of the students is a cause for scandal then look for ways in which the students can participate in all of this in a just way.

We also express our solidarity with our sister republic of Guatemala where the villages el El Rodeo, Amatillo, Agua Blanca, El Camalote, Tunonó, Carrizalito and other parts of the municipality of Olopa and Chiquimula have denounced abuses against the *campesinos*.

This is the panorama at this time when we end another year and when we celebrate today the feast of the Holy Family. In all of this, however, a bright light shines forth: the peace of Nazareth. The calmness of the Holy Family in no way distances them from our problems but rather places them in the midst of the great problems of the world --- they become a mirror, a fountain, an inspiration and the goal of all people who live in the midst of the confusion and anxiety of this world. Therefore let us have faith and hope in the Christian values of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Family. So be it.

¹ See Homily of Paul VI in the crypt of the Annunciation in Nazareth (5 January 1964).

² See Marín de San Martín, *Juan XXIII, Retrato eclesiológico*, Barcelona, 1998, note 11.

³ See *Orientación*, 31 December 1978.

⁴ See *Ibid.*

⁵ See *Diario de Hoy*, 30 December 1978.

⁶ He was kidnapped the 28 of December 1978 and was son of J Antonio Bonilla, owner of the Teleférico San Jacinto. See *El Diario de Hoy*, 29 December 1978.

⁷ Ian Cameron Massie and Michael Chatterton, kidnapped 30 November 1978.

⁸ Takakazu Suzuki, kidnapped 7 December 1978.

⁹ *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares* (6 August 1978), pp. 48-49. The letter quotes an article published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 23 June 1978, under the title "Lo stato democratico e la violenza".

Marginal References (1) GS 47; (2) Jn 1,14; (3) Lk 2,39-40; (4) Si 3,2.12-13; (5) Si 3,5; (6) Si 3,6; (7) Col 3,12; (8) GS 52; (9) GS 52; (10) M 3,4; (11) M 3,4; (12) Jn 4,34; (13) M 3,7; (14) Col 3,18-21; (15) Col 3,22-24; (16) Col 3,24-25; (17) Col 4,1; (18) Col 3,25; (19) Lk 2,24; (20) GS 48; (21) Mt 19,6; (22) Col 3,12; (23) Col 3,18.20; (24) LG 11; (25) M 3,4; (26) M 3,6; (27) M 3,6; (28) Lk 2,29-32; (29) Lk 2,34; (30) Lk 2,35; (31) Lk 2,36-38; (32) Mk 9,34; (33) Mk 9,35.