

## CHRIST, EPIPHANY OF GOD'S SAVING LOVE

**Feast of the Epiphany**  
**January 7, 1979**

*Isaiah 60:1-6*

*Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6*

*Matthew 2:1-12*

My sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience:

Today we are celebrating one of the most important feasts of the Liturgical Year, a feast called the Epiphany. This feast is properly celebrated on January 6<sup>th</sup> but because there are many people who are unable to assist at Mass during the week, and in order that these people might celebrate and receive the beautiful message of the Epiphany, this feast has been transferred to the following Sunday, that is, today, January 7<sup>th</sup>. The meaning of this feast in the Liturgical Year is derived from the fact that this feast is the culmination of the Advent and Christmas seasons. From the beginning of Advent, which began four weeks ago, the Church has proclaimed: *the Lord is coming!* Advent was a time of preparation and on Christmas we celebrated the arrival of God. The insertion of the divine life into human history is so important that the Church prolongs the proclamation of this season. Indeed, the Christmas proclamation receives a new impulse which becomes even stronger during this celebration of the feast of the Epiphany.

*Epiphany* is a Greek word which means revelation or manifestation. Today the Child who comes and who was born in Bethlehem is revealed. The child reveals himself as the salvation of God that comes through him. The people who during the Advent season proclaimed: *Come, Lord!* find their answer in the person of the Magi from the East: humanity finds God in this child who is adored and offered gifts.

Epiphany is a Greek word that has a religious significance because non-believers used this word to refer to a benevolent, unexpected appearance of a person who brought health and salvation. Epiphany is similar to another word that we explained before: *parousia*. *Parousia* refers to the official visit of a person, usually a person of authority, who comes to a city, but in this case the authoritative person is divine. It is God who visits and comes to the world with salvific intentions. The sacred writings of the New Testament, especially Saint Paul, have communicated to us this new meaning of the Epiphany: ... *In Christ, God has appeared to men and women as their true Savior*. This word also refers to the second coming of Christ which is also called an Epiphany because at that time Christ will appear in a new coming and will judge history.

The meaning of this feast is so significant that in the East (where perhaps their theological intuition is more acute) on this day the feast of the Nativity and the Epiphany are celebrated together. In the East, January 6<sup>th</sup> is Christmas and at the same time is the day when God is revealed in this child who is born.

Gathering together the long history of the feast of the Epiphany, the priest's breviary contains an antiphon, a stanza, which unites three gospel events: the adoration of the Magi, the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan, and the first miracle of Jesus, the transformation of water into wine. Uniting these three miracles as three epiphanies in one, today's feast is presented to us as a marriage, a nuptial mystery between God and his Church --- a marriage between God who was merciful to sinful humanity and therefore came to save and purify and make all people his spouse forever. The antiphon that I spoke about reads as follows: *Today the Bridegroom claims his bride, the Church, since Christ has washed her sins away in Jordan's waters, the Magi hasten with their gifts to the royal wedding and the wedding guests rejoice, for Christ has changed water into wine, alleluia.* This is a beautiful synthesis of the three epiphanies: the adoration of the Magi, the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, when the skies opened and a voice proclaimed: *You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased* (1) and the miracle that took place in Cana of Galilee in which Saint John tells us that the Virgin interceded on behalf of the newly wed couple who did not have enough wine. She did not want them to be embarrassed on the occasion of their wedding. The gospel of Saint John concluded the narration of this event with the words: *Jesus did this as the beginning of his signs in Cana of Galilee and so revealed (epiphany) his glory and his disciples began to believe in him* (2). My sisters and brothers, let us reflect on this beautiful feast, the feast that celebrates the marriage of God with sinful women and men who were in need of purification and salvation. May this profound relationship with Christ enable us to feel that our deepest hopes have been fulfilled!

I will develop the following three ideas: first; the Epiphany reveals a transcendental salvation, that is, a salvation that does not arise from within the human person, but rather arises outside women and men, a salvation that transcends humanity's ability; second; the Epiphany offers universal salvation. No one is excluded from salvation and this gift of salvation is revealed to everyone. Jesus offers this gift to all people. The saving love of God is offered to everyone: to everyone who fills the Cathedral this morning and to the thousands of people who, thanks to God, are listening to my voice on the radio. All of us, you and I, are brought together for this celebration, for this royal wedding. No one is excluded from participating in this joy, this salvation and this hope. Third; through faith we obtain the salvation that is offered and revealed in the Epiphany. Faith is the condition that enables us to receive the gift of the Epiphany, the gift of universal salvation.

### **The epiphany reveals a transcendental salvation**

I focus on the first reading from the prophet Isaiah: *Rise up in splendor! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, a darkness covers the earth and thick clouds cover the people, but upon you the Lord shines, and over you appears his glory* (3). This prophet and poet encouraged the Israelites to return from exile in Babylon. The people found Jerusalem destroyed and they were very pessimistic about the future. They needed to have their spirits lifted. Thus the sight of Jerusalem that had been destroyed by the enemies of Israel became a sign of hope for the people: *upon you (Jerusalem) the Lord shines* (3). All the promises of the Old Testament are leading the people to understand that *glory* does not arise from them. In Jerusalem everything is in ruins. There is pessimism, a strong feeling of frustration: from within themselves they can find nothing that is good. There is a need for something transcendental, for something to come from outside the human person. The destroyed city of Jerusalem will shine with the very light of God. God becomes incarnated within the city of Jerusalem.

My sisters and brothers, this reality also fills us with hope as we reflect on our own human strength and realize that there are so many things that we cannot do, as we reflect on our own nation that appears to be trapped in a dead end street, and as we say here that politics and diplomacy cannot resolve our situation. Here everything is destroyed and a disaster and it is foolish to deny this fact. A transcendental solution is necessary. Upon these ruins the glory of the God will shine. Thus, at the present time in our nation's history Christians have received a great mission: to maintain this hope and not to be waiting for some type of utopia, some illusion. Rather Christians must be awake and aware of our reality and appeal to and lift up their voices for this transcendental redemption.

In light of this idea, I would also like to reflect on the star that guided the Magi. This reminds us of a prophecy. In the time of Balaam when Balak asked that he prophecy on behalf of his armies, Balaam, inspired by the Spirit of God, looks toward the desert and sees the glory of Israel. Among the many beautiful words that he proclaims, he said the following: *I see him, though not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall advance from Jacob and a staff shall arise from Israel* (4). Without a doubt the gospel of Saint Matthew brings together all the prophecies of the Old Testament in order to show how these prophecies are fulfilled in Christ. When he speaks about the mysterious star, he is thinking about the prophecy of Balaam: *A star will arise from Jacob and draw near, but it is still far off --- centuries will pass --- but this star will come --- come like a star that comes from afar* (5). The star that guided the Magi is the presence of a transcendence that comes to save us. The staff that was spoken about by Balaam is the staff of David whose reign would have no end. In other words, his reign would not be like that of other royal persons because from his royal descendents a shoot would spring forth, a son of David according to the flesh, but at the same time this person would also be the Son of God in eternity. His kingdom would have no end. This is the religious meaning of the star. On this feast of the Epiphany, the star is a sign of transcendental salvation, a sign of someone who comes from the heavenly world, from God, from the immensity and power of God who has created us not to be sinners but rather has placed us in the midst of the world that we are living in today and enables us to be led along an enlightened path toward salvation. Perhaps we can say like Balaam: *I behold him, but not near* (Numbers 24:17). We do not know when redemption will take place but it will come about --- I see the star drawing near and the staff of David will arise to lead us to salvation.

In today's second reading, Saint Paul speaks to us about the revelation of a mystery that was hidden for centuries (6), the revelation of the fact that salvation is for everyone. It is beautiful to ponder the fact that we are the heirs of this revelation and that we wait for this mystery that was hidden in God but that is given to us for our salvation because God loves us. My dear sisters and brothers, salvation comes from God and we should have no doubt about this. In light of this reality I am going to speak about concepts that are transcendental.

In my Pastoral Letter, *The Church and Popular Political Organization*, I speak about (and I do not want you to forget this) the great service that the Church is providing today, here in El Salvador. In the words of the weakened Pontiff, Paul VI, whose extended hands I had the pleasure to hold: this mission consists of *accompanying the people in their just demands, but never acting with hatred or violence, rather always acting justly*. Inspired by these words and by his message *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, an exhortation on Evangelization in the Present World, we come to an understanding of the meaning of this revelation, this epiphany of the Church of 1979 here in El Salvador.

The service that the Church desires to provide to the effort to obtain the just demands of the people is the following: the Church desires to insert herself within the global designs of liberation that the Church proclaims. I write in my pastoral:

*The overall plan of the liberation proclaimed by the Church involves the whole person, in all dimensions, including openness to the absolute that is God, and to that extent it is linked to a certain understanding of human nature --- an understanding that cannot be sacrificed to the demands of any particular strategy, tactic, or short-term expedient.*<sup>1</sup> In other words, the liberation that the Church offers cannot be limited to worldly practices.

The overall plan of liberation *is centered on the Kingdom of God and although its mission is not limited to religion, it nevertheless reaffirms the primacy of humanity's spiritual vocation and proclaims salvation in Jesus Christ.*<sup>2</sup> The Church gives primary attention to that which is spiritual and this should not be forgotten by those who say that the Church is preaching revolution and class struggle. This is a lie! I have stated very clearly: the Church reaffirms the primacy of humanity's spiritual and religious vocation and proclaims salvation in Jesus Christ.

This liberation that the Church proclaims *proceeds from a scriptural vision of human nature, is based on a deep desire for justice in love, implies a truly spiritual dimension that has as its final aim salvation and happiness with God.*<sup>3</sup> We say to everyone, even to those who organize themselves in popular political organizations, that the salvation that people must look for is not simply found in obtaining better wages or having a better government or having a better situation here on earth but rather is found by looking for the final objective of salvation. Salvation and happiness in God is possessed by those persons who live the primacy of that which is spiritual, even though they might be very poor on this earth.

Therefore, the Church's liberation *demands a conversion of heart and mind, and is not satisfied with merely structural changes.*<sup>4</sup> What good is it to change structures and forms of government and forms of political organizations if the people who are going to direct these structures still carry corruption in their hearts? What good is it to change our social situation if those who are going to live in these structures are not inwardly renewed so that they are more just, converted, more neighbourly?

Lastly, and note this well, this liberation *excludes violence, considering it unchristian and unscriptural, ineffective and out of keeping with the dignity of the people.*<sup>5</sup> Violence is not in keeping with the dignity of the Church.

On this last point I made reference to the words of the Pope that were proclaimed in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (7) when he said that if the Church supports the liberating efforts of the world but loses the global perspective of Christian salvation, then *the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems.*<sup>6</sup> The Church would have no authority to proclaim the liberation that comes from God. In other words, the Epiphany is guiding us with the star of the Magi, with the perspective of a clarity that comes from God in order to save people. As we search for liberation we cannot enclose ourselves within earthly and temporal limitations. The true liberation that the Church proclaims and with which she accompanies the liberating efforts of humanity places these efforts in a global context and orients them toward salvation.

My dear sisters and brothers, the Church wants to orient all these efforts and it is for this reason that it should not appear as strange that the Church supports everything that is just and good even when this justice and goodness is found in organizations that are called clandestine. If people seek that which is just then there one also finds the Kingdom of God. I tell you then: worldly intentions are not enough but rather it is necessary that the justice that people seek be seen within a global context of universal salvation, in the context of happiness with God, in the context of transcendental redemption. This is the great merit of the Church and for this reason other people defame her preaching about these liberating efforts --- yes, the Church preaches a liberation that cannot be reduced to merely earthly realities. When the Church proclaims the defense of human rights she is not placing herself in some political perspective. The political treaties that today defend human rights, tomorrow can change because political systems change. The Church, however, from the perspective of the star, from her transcendental perspective, will never change. Even though the Church might be completely abandoned, she knows that she is with God and that the transcendence of God will illuminate her in the same way that the clarity of God illuminated Jerusalem so that she was able to proclaim to all people: *Rise up in splendor! Shine forth Jerusalem! Your light has come!* (8)

### **The Epiphany offers universal salvation**

Secondly, in the readings for the feast of the Epiphany we find a great missionary idea: the salvation that is offered to us today on this feast of the Epiphany is a universal salvation. I can imagine that this morning, all of us who have come to Mass here in the Cathedral and all those who are reflecting with us as they listen to their radios --- all of us are part of a great procession that began twenty centuries ago. The first persons in this procession were the Magi from the East and after them came others and still others. The words of the prophet Isaiah are being fulfilled: *Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord* (9). How poetic is our gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist! Let us never neglect coming to Mass on Sunday! Indeed, our gathering together is a procession of magi who adore Jesus, a procession of people who have found the universal salvation that God offers to all people.

When the gospel speaks to us about the Magi we are reminded about these names: Midian, Ephah and Sheba. These were cities in Persia, today known as Iran, a place that we often read about in our newspapers because of the great conflicts that are taking place there. That Middle Eastern nation was the first place to receive God's call because it was there that God called Abraham, the first believer. Without a doubt as Saint Matthew spoke about the Magi from the East (10), from this mysterious Eastern country, he was reminding us about the origins of our faith. Because of his faith Abraham is the father of all believers. Today from that same place God has called the first Gentiles and it does not matter that they were not part of the Jewish people or children of Abraham, what is important is the faith that the Magi brought with them from the East.

Here we focus on the second reading where Saint Paul tells us: *When you read this you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (11). Let us experience ourselves as being spoken about in this passage from Saint Paul's writings. Four centuries ago these lands on which the

Cathedral stands were Indian jungles. When the Cross arrived and our aboriginal people began to adore the Cross, the vocation of all people was being fulfilled here in Latin America. Today the bishops of Mexico, the hosts of the gathering of the Latin American Bishops in Puebla which will begin on January 27<sup>th</sup>, have published a Pastoral Letter<sup>7</sup>. They state: *what is going to occur in Mexico this year began with the Virgin of Guadalupe who appeared in Tepeyac as a catechist and oriented the Indian people toward the Cross, toward Christianity.*

Mary is an integral part of the evangelization process in the present and the future of Latin America. The gospel that was proclaimed to our people in America was a fulfillment of the command that Saint Paul speaks about: *this mystery that was hidden for so many centuries is now revealed to me. The Gentiles, non-Jewish people, the Indians of America, all the people who live in these virgin mountains, and all those who do not know Christ are called to share in his promise and his salvation. No one is excluded!* (12).

In this context of universal salvation it is good to remember, my sisters and brothers, the pastoral and evangelical lines of the Second Vatican Council that ten years ago became the pastoral guidelines of Latin America and proclaimed an integral salvation. This ought to continue to challenge us as a new Medellin is dawning with the approach of our gathering in Puebla. These pastoral guidelines proclaim that the liberation that Christ has given us is a liberation of the whole person (13). The whole person must be saved: body and soul, individuals and society. The Kingdom of God must be established now on earth. God's reign must be established now on earth. The reign of God finds itself hindered and manacled by many idolatrous misuses of money and power. Those false gods must be overthrown, just as the first evangelizers in the Americas overthrew the false gods that our natives adored. Today the idols are different. They are called money, political interests, national security. As idolatries, they are trying to displace God from his altar. The Church declares that people can be happy only when, like the Magi, they adore the one true God: when they have freed themselves from false idolatries and come with a pure Christian faith to adore the Christ that we must all adore with more integrity.

I want to remind you here how Pope Paul VI gathered together the echoes of the modern Magi, the bishops who came from all over the world to participate in the Synod of Bishops in 1974. The voice of the bishops expressed the feelings of millions of people and these experiences led to the composition of these tragic but eloquent words. Paul VI stated: *It is well known in what terms numerous bishops from all the continents spoke of this at the last Synod, especially the bishops from the Third World, with a pastoral accent resonant with the voice of the millions of sons and daughters of the Church who make up those peoples. Peoples, as we know, engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The Church, as the bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children --- the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization* (14). These are the Pope's words and they have nothing to do with communism. Here the Pope is speaking about the demands of the gospel. His words are the proclamation of Isaiah: *the light of justice will shine on the darkness of so many injustices in the world* (15). His words are an expression of the cries of Saint Paul that all people and all the Gentiles will participate in the liberation of Christ (16). His words are also an expression of the primacy of the Magi who now have returned in the powerless river

of humanity. The cathedrals of the world, filled like this one, worship the Lord and look for this hope and faith in Christ that the salvific love of God has brought us like an Epiphany.

Before moving on to my third point let us see how faith is necessary in order to appropriate for ourselves the love that God offers us. Before speaking about this final thought that will draw us near to the altar in order to adore God in the Eucharist, I want to pause here so that we can see that the Magi, with the symbolic gifts of incense, gold and myrrh, bring the pain and sorrows and the concerns of their people to beg salvation from the only one who can give it. So it is in our own history. Each Sunday when I speak of the specific events of the week, I am only a poor adorer of the Lord, telling him: Lord, I bring you what the people produce, what the interaction of these people of El Salvador, rich and poor, rulers and ruled, bring forth. This is what we bring the Lord. Therefore, as we review the historic events of the week I ask you not to view these words of my homily in some evil manner nor should these words be seen as exclusive. For me the primary part of my poor homilies is the doctrine that I want to share with you. For example, the primary idea that we should take from this celebration is the fact that Jesus Christ is the epiphany, the manifestation of God's love to humanity. This is what interests me most and what I hope we will all reflect upon. To live this doctrine in our concrete situation, however, we cannot forget that which is occurring around and among us and that which is occurring inside and outside the Church.

### **Life of the Church**

Beginning tomorrow the priests of the Archdiocese are going to have a week of reflection on the theme of *Priestly Identity*. In *Orientación* you will find a wonderful commentary<sup>8</sup>: during the time of crisis people must ask themselves: *Who am I? What is my role in the world?* If there is a person who has problems during the hour of crisis it is the priest. Therefore at this time when the priest is slandered and held in contempt or when he is praised in order to gain his confidence, it is necessary that he know who he is and that he not be someone else. During these days one has been able to read the names of priests that were listed on posters that were pasted onto the walls of many buildings. One would think that these persons were *guerrilleros*. It was ridiculous because there one was able to find the names of men who were harmless. But these people who put up these posters do not care about this. I would like them to put up posters that mention the names of the many priests who are involved in official politics and identified with ORDEN. But nothing is said about this. Therefore we do not lean toward any political party but we must be what we must be: priests in the midst of people, priests who are not afraid of the realities of the people, priests who courageously place themselves in the midst of these realities in the same way that Christ placed himself in the midst of the realities of his time (17). Thus priests will eat with sinners and accompany delinquents but they will always do this as priests. For this reason we are going to come together. I ask that you pray for the priests during this week of reflection that will begin tomorrow in El Seminario de San José de la Montaña.

A sorrowful note concerning our priests. During the past week Father Nilo Cuchiaro died. He was a Franciscan priest who spent many years working in the seminary in Planes de Renderos. He had been transferred to Zacatecoluca. He died, as you read in the newspapers<sup>9</sup>, as a result of drowning in the ocean. He was from Italy and shared his life with us. He renounced his family and his homeland in order to minister with us. It is just that we, the community that receives his body, should pray for him and be grateful to the Franciscan community. Let us accompany them at this time of mourning.

I received this painful telegram from Father Antonio Pocasangre: *I am deeply disturbed. The sacrilegious thefts continue and now they have stolen the chalice.* In Panchimalco the chalice was also stolen and Father is doing everything possible to recover this sacred vessel. I ask for your help in this matter because this chalice is a jewel of the colonial Church and it is a shame that it should be lost.

Some more news about our priests. This evening at 7:30pm we are going to celebrate the Eucharist with several priests in the parish of Miramonte. We will offer this Mass for the eternal rest of the mother of Father Rogelio, the pastor of Zacamil. We once again renew our condolences to him.

A final note about our priests. There will be a change in pastors in the parish of Assunción, Mejicanos. Father Manuel Barrera has ministered with much success there and desires to rest for a while. Father Samuel Orellana and Father Octavio Ortiz will take his place and be installed at 5:00pm. I want to take this opportunity to thank Father Barrera for his generous and noble service and also wish the new pastor much success in the parish.

Visiting the communities, on Thursday, I was in the parish of Concepción in Quezaltepeque, Chalatenango, in the village of La Junta where there was a sacrilegious theft of the Blessed Sacrament. We offered an act of atonement which was very impressive. I want to greet Father Eduardo Alas and the Spanish religious community of the Carmelite Missionaries who are ministering and catechizing in such a way that one is able to experience there a very lively and devout community. Without a doubt the celebration of the Eucharist will bring about an even greater devotion in that parish. Among the letters that the *campesinos* gave me I found one that concludes with the words: *give a warm greeting to our Holy Father when you see him in Puebla.* In this letter from the catechists we can see how much the people love the Holy Father. I believe that this is one of the characteristics of our communities --- their profound love for the Pope.

I was also on Friday in San José Villanueva where the Passionist Sisters and Father Benito Tovar have developed a wonderful group of lay people as pastoral ministers and are exercising a wonderful pastoral ministry that is in accord with the guidelines of the Archdiocese. And yesterday I went to Apopa where we celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation for some young women and men and also had a very animated pastoral meeting that was led by Father Oscar Marrell. I want to let you know that the celebration of Confirmation with these young people is making them aware of the true meaning of this sacrament that we want to give its proper value.

From the community of Apulo I received a beautiful Christmas offering from the *campesinos* who deprived themselves of many things in order to give this gift to their sisters and brothers, primarily those who are in prison. I want to thank them and assure them that this gift will be given to the prisoners. Among some of the things that have occurred during this Christmas season, wonderful things that always occur in the world of the poor, I want to highlight the gift that a woman from Los Planes de Olocuilta gave me. She said: *this is a Christmas gift for the orphans.* I have also received many expressive letters that speak about the meaning of these feastday celebrations which for many people are occasions of happiness and extravagance and for many others, occasions of anguish and pain. Take for example a gardener: *who notices the work of a gardener who labors from sunrise until late in the night and very often continues to work as a servant during the celebration of a feast --- working*



*many times until three o'clock in the morning?* Another letter from a night watchman spoke about spending Christmas *guarding and often times placing himself in great danger*. I ask you to keep all these people in mind because they seem to be forgotten and yet they are great benefactors --- they are our sisters and brothers.

Today at 6:00pm the parish community of the Holy Family in Colonia Centro América will celebrate their patronal feast. The Community of San Martín received the gift of a ciborium to replace the one that had been stolen. The members of this community expressed their gratitude to the people of La Colonia Luz and La Colonia Montserrat who gave them this gift as a sign of their fraternity.

I want to let you know, my sisters and brothers, that on Friday of this week, January 12<sup>th</sup>, the National Commission for Justice and Peace is going to celebrate a Mass here in the Cathedral at 7:00pm. The Nuncio and all the bishops have been invited to participate in this Mass and Bishop Rivera who is the President of the Social Commission will present some reflections on the Pope's Message that was written on the occasion of the celebration of the World Day of Peace.

I want to ask you to pray for the preparations that are being made for our celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which will be celebrated from January 18-25. This is a worldwide ecumenical celebration in which Protestants and Catholics ask God for this precious gift of unity. We pray that we might be able to present ourselves to the world as a united body and not divided. We pray that in the words of Jesus we might be *one flock under one shepherd* (18).

We unite ourselves with those people who are making a novena to the Lord of Esquipulas which is being celebrated primarily in San Bartolomé Perulapía, in Colón and in Aguilares. Through the newspaper<sup>10</sup> we have also become aware of the fact that in the Central Market people are honoring the Black Christ of Esquipulas. I want to tell you that it is good that we honor Christ in this way because Christ is worthy of our love. It would not be good, however, if we do this with a sense of competition and even less worthy if we did this from an economic perspective, that is, seeing who is able to collect more money. Therefore some people use these comparisons and say: *do not spend you money on a trip to Esquipulas, spend it here!* We must understand that every person is free to express their devotion as they please. It would not be good that a very worthy devotion to the Crucified Christ should be viewed from an economic aspect.

I want to tell you that in order to provide greater access to our publications we are going to open here in the Cathedral an office of distribution. There you can obtain copies of the Pastoral Letter, documents of the Church, *Orientación*, etc. Today the appendices of the Pastoral Letter, which many are looking for, are available. You can obtain these as you leave the Cathedral.

I am happy to tell you that through the effort of some good Catholics they are going to edit and publish the homilies that are delivered here in the Cathedral<sup>11</sup>. The first homily that will be prepared and published next week is the homily that was proclaimed on the First Sunday of Advent.

The Church, which on a local level is defined by certain characteristics, is able to look toward the horizon and find some very consoling news and this gives us strength. For

example, we have read in the newspapers this week<sup>12</sup> that three times the Pope condemned the crime of abortion and spoke against divorce. Because the Pope defended Christian morality in some very delicate areas, the Italian press and television has attacked him. You can see that being condemned by the world is a very common consequence when an apostle desires to fulfill his duty. The newspapers even said that the applause that was given to the Pope was not as strong as before because the Pope was touching on old matters that had been overcome<sup>13</sup>. This is simply a lie! Moral life begins in the womb of a woman and faithfulness to the marriage vows is both old and new. The Church must defend these realities even when she might lose the applause of people and even when she might have to suffer attacks from the public.

In order that you might see how the Church is also concerned about political realities: who has not read in the newspapers<sup>14</sup> the fact that the Pope has sent a Cardinal to Chile to mediate the conflict that has arisen between Argentina and Chile?

I want to share with you some other news about our Continent and ask for your prayers. As you know the meeting of the Bishops in Puebla is drawing near. The Secretary General, Bishop López Trujillo, has said: *Puebla ought to be an effort at unity in charity and in truth*<sup>15</sup>. This should comfort us because we are not going to Puebla to look for some advantage or to favor one current trend over another, rather we are looking for the truth. What does God want for the Church in Latin America? This is the concern that ought to animate the prayers of all the faithful and the work of the bishops who are going to have the honor of participating in the meeting at Puebla. As all of you know the Pope will be present and it is very beautiful to see that there is great interest in going to Puebla to see the Pope, even though people might only be able to see him from a distance. As you already know, the pilgrims who are going there are going to have a lay-over in the Dominican Republic. This has been announced by the numerous pilgrims from the Caribbean Islands who will go to the Dominican Republic to see the Pope pass by there. He will undoubtedly pause there to greet his children. In Guadalajara and the other cities that the Pope will visit things are being prepared. As we said at the beginning of this homily, it is as though people are waiting for a true epiphany: the visit of a sovereign, the Supreme Pastor of the Church. Blessed be God that the Pope, the head of the Church, is always news!

### **Events of the week**

My beloved sisters and brothers, we want to inform you that as part of the history of this week one of the persons who had been abducted, Mr. Schuiteman from Holland, was freed. His statements have been published in the newspapers and broadcast on the radio. It is interesting that in his statements he spoke about eating chicken and was even given whisky<sup>16</sup>. I hope that all those people who have disappeared and those who are prisoners and dying of hunger could say that they were not treated very inhumanely.

Nevertheless, everything is not resolved. The two Englishmen and Mr. Susuki from Japan continue to be held captive. FARN insists on asking for the release of five political prisoners as a condition for the release of the two Englishmen. FARN has also asked the Mediating Commission of Human Right to incorporate me as a member<sup>17</sup>. I am now a member of this Commission and am willing to cooperate in any way that I can. From my position as Pastor I want to highlight the following: My position as Pastor obliges me to express my solidarity with everyone who suffers and to embody every effort on behalf of human freedom and dignity. As Pastor I have participated with pleasure on the Human

Rights Commission and I hope to obtain the freedom of those who have been abducted. In my capacity as Pastor, I want to call your attention to the pain of the family members of these men: those who are able to resolve this conflict which could have a tragic ending ... please do everything that is possible to resolve this situation. We are dealing with human life here and human life should be placed above all forms of legal process especially since these processes are also human. We are saddened that Dr. Manuel Antonio Bonilla continues to be held captive and we still have no idea who is responsible for this action. Amnesty International has also asked FARN to release those who have been abducted.

The Human Rights Commission has asked for a general amnesty and the repeal of the Law of Guarantee and Public Order. Before the request of the Human Rights Commission, CUTS, ANDES, the Committee pro-freedom for Political Prisoners, the political parties PDC and MNR had already made the same request. This is an often-heard cry and an international cry! Many letters have arrived from Amnesty International in support of this petition. It is amazing the secrecy and the silence that is maintained in light of these cries! An affirmative response would open channels of trust for the betterment of the situation of our people.

The mothers of those who have disappeared and who are being asked to pay ransom have written a letter to the wife of the President and have asked her to intervene. Perhaps the heart of a woman, a heart that is by nature more compassionate, can bring about a solution to this difficult situation.

On Saturday the Year of the Child was inaugurated<sup>18</sup>. We remind you that together with the child, people ought to become aware of what it means to be responsible parents. Children are so helpless that if it were not for their parents and other adults they would not be able to exist. Therefore, as we say in *Orientación*<sup>19</sup>, our celebration of the Year of the Child should be a call to the conscience of adults. Hopefully during this Year of the Child fathers will become more responsible because if we are saddened by this demographic explosion, it is because there is much immorality and lack of discipline and responsibility in men and women. It is not just to bring children into this world when we do not provide them with the bread that should be given to those who are invited to share with us the gift of life.

We also want to denounce the death threats that Dr. Lara Velado and Dr. Manuel Ungo have received<sup>20</sup>. If something happens to the persons who have been abducted people have said that these threats will become real. Let us avoid the bloodshed of more innocent victims! I would hope that these are just rumors and threats. I also hope that it is also just a rumor because I was told this week that I should be careful, that something was being plotted against my life. I trust in the Lord and I know that the ways of providence protect one who tries to serve him.

I also want to speak about the labor conflicts that involve workers and *campesinos*. We are saddened that so many complaints about unjust situations continue to arrive at our office. I am not going to speak much about this here but I am going to submit these complaints to our Publicity Office that is broadcasting those denunciations that can be proven. In other words these complaints must be able to be proven and there must be witnesses.

We are saddened by the situation in Nicaragua. On January 11<sup>th</sup> the people of Nicaragua will commemorate the death of Dr. Chamorro and the situation may get worse. We beg the Lord to return peace to our sister country.

We also pray for the meeting in which the heads of state of England, the United States, France and West Germany will participate. Since this is a meeting of nations that are very influential in the history of our world, we pray that the results of this gathering may be beneficial for the whole world.

Finally, my dear sisters and brothers, I know that we could continue to speak about the story of each family that is present here, that is, the pains and the anguish of each person, but I tell you that all of this is now gathered together by the Church in the offering she presents on God's altar which becomes one with the sacrifice of Christ.

### **Through faith we share in the salvation and love of God**

The last idea of my homily is the following: all of human life and all of the concrete history of the people and families, of the Salvadorians and of people from whatever country - -- all of this history is called to be redeemed, but one condition is necessary: faith.

We are going to conclude our reflections this morning with this thought. The Vatican Council states: *The obedience of faith is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals, and freely assenting to the truth revealed by Him* (19). In other words, faith is not simply believing in some truths with one's mind but it involves a handing over of a person's feelings and obedience. This is called the obedience of faith because God speaks to us in the same way that he spoke to Abraham: *Go forth from the land of you kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you* (20). His act of faith consisted in leaving his father's house and traveling to the place that God pointed out. Abraham throws himself into the emptiness but is also aware that the hand of God is holding him in check. Abraham throws himself in the midst of a dangerous situation but there is a powerful hand that defends him: this is faith. Faith does not simply mean that a person believes with the mind but rather hands over his/her heart and life.

The Magi follow the star, they seek information in Jerusalem, they adore Jesus in Bethlehem and offer him gifts, this is a beautiful image of faith. So then, what did the Magi do when they received the invitation of God in the language of the star? They followed. They obeyed the call. It is beautiful to see the Magi on bended knee before the child Jesus offering him gold, incense and myrrh. This is a beautiful expression of people of faith!

We find ourselves before a mystery and to believe is not the same as saying two plus two are four --- there can be no other solution to this mathematical problem; the solution is evident and there is no need for faith. But we are asked to believe in the words of the Magi who say that the poor child in Bethlehem is the Son of God. This is a mystery! This is not so evident! Therefore people will have doubts and there will be conflicts of faith. My dear sisters and brothers, do not be surprised when you experience these conflicts of faith. For example, when you look at the Church with her defects and sins, how can this Church be the spouse of Christ? This is the doubt and also the proof of faith. This is also the moment when the person of faith hands his life over because God has spoken --- therefore I believe.

The Council continues to speak about a reality that should never be lost sight of. The Council states: *To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it* (21). In order that the intelligence of revelation might be deepened, the Holy Spirit continually

perfects faith by means of his gifts. Faith is a gift. Let us give thanks to the Lord! Our coming together to celebrate Mass and adore God is a voluntary offering of faith. Just as it is evident that two plus two is four so to it is evident that we must come to Mass. Yes, we will have doubts and there will be difficulties. But in the midst of these difficulties we find the grace of God that will help us to overcome our doubts, to rise above that which is not so evident. Faith is a gift of understanding and a gift of the heart that is offered to God who reveals himself to us, to God who loves us and whose revelation can never be denied.

My dear sisters and brothers, let us now move to the altar and live the beauty of these reflections on the Epiphany. In Christ there is an Epiphany because God reveals his love and saving power to humanity. So be it.

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<sup>1</sup> *La Iglesia y las organizaciones políticas populares*, (6 August 1978), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> See *La presencia de Santa María de Guadalupe y el compromiso evangelizador de nuestra fe*. A pastoral exhortation from the Bishop's Conference of Mexico on the occasion of the Puebla Meeting (15 August 1978), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 December 1978.

<sup>8</sup> See "Notas al margen: Quién soy yo", *Orientación*, 7 January 1979.

<sup>9</sup> See *Diario de Hoy*, 4 January 1979.

<sup>10</sup> See *Diario de Hoy*, 5 January 1979.

<sup>11</sup> The reference is to the first edition of Mons. Romero's homilies which were published and distributed every week in pamphlets with the title *Sentir con la Iglesia. Voz y pensamiento de monseñor Oscar A. Romero*.

<sup>12</sup> See Homily of John Paul II in the Roman church of the "Gesù" (31 December 1978) and in the General Audience (3 January 1979), *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7 January 1979.

<sup>13</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 3 & 4 December 1979.

<sup>14</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 3 & 6 January 1979.

<sup>15</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica*, 6 January 1979.

<sup>16</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 3 January 1979.

<sup>17</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> The United Nations declared 1979 the "International Year of the Child".

<sup>19</sup> See *Orientación*, 7 January 1979.

<sup>20</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 5 January 1979.

*Marginal References* (1) Mt 13,17; (2) Jn 2,11; (3) Is 60,1-2; (4) Nb 24,17; (5) Nb 24,17; (6) Ep 3,6; (7) EN 32; (8) Is 60,1; (9) Is 60,6; (10) Mt 2,1; (11) Ep 3,5-6; (12) Ep 3,6; (13) GS 13; (14) EN 30; (15) Is 60,1; (16) Ep 3,6; (17) Mt 9,11; (18) Jn 10,16; (19) DV 5; (20) Gn 12,1; (21) DV 5.