

CHRIST, THE KING: KEY TO OUR HISTORY

**Thirty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time
November 25, 1979**

*Daniel 7:13-14
Revelation 1:5-8
John 18:33-37*

My beloved sisters and brothers.

With the joy of one who experiences unity with the Pope I read to you his letter of thanks for our congratulating him on the day of his anniversary:

*Reverend Archbishop; I happily fulfill my duty in expressing the profound thanks of his Holiness for the courteous message of congratulations that you sent in the name of the priests and faithful of San Salvador on the occasion of the first anniversary of his Pontificate. I am happy to communicate to you that the Holy Father, with loving sentiments in the Lord, asks that new heavenly blessings be poured out upon you so that you may be the instrument of renewed encouragement in the building up of the ecclesial community and from the bottom of his heart also imparts his apostolic blessing. Sincerely yours in Christ, the Secretary of State.**

My dear sisters and brothers, with this bond that unites us once again with the Pope we experience joy as we come to the close of another year of fidelity in following the sacred liturgy. Today is the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year and like people who from the summit of the mountain look back at the long road that we have traveled, we are reminded of the vision that the Lord offers us between the time that has passed and the Kingdom of God which remains from ancient times, thus the ancient saying: *stat cruz dum volvitur orbis (the cross is steady while the world is turning)*. As we have previously said, the Liturgical Year which we celebrate week after week is like the sudden wave that appears in our midst. At the same time we calmly behold the Kingdom of God, the mystery of Christ and his cross which is always before us.

Therefore, today on the feast of Christ the King, a feast that crowns the Liturgical Year, we have an opportunity to look with optimism at the situation of our country, its fears and hopes. We look at our situation as people who know that our heart and faith is united with the love and power of a King who reigns forever. This was the mind of Pius XI who in 1925, at the close of the Holy Year which is celebrated every twenty-five years, wanted to leave this feast of Christ the King as a memorial of that celebration. People were still experiencing the consequences of the First World War. War had distorted the universe and people were separated and being led into sin ... there was a lack of unity and materialism became evident. The Pope said: *in order that this divided and materialistic world might find a path that leads to a solution, the Church points out a path that brings people to Christ, the King.* (1)

At the beginning of this year the Pope spoke to us in Puebla and said: *From you, pastors, the faithful of your countries expect and demand first and foremost a careful and zealous transmission of the truth about Jesus Christ. This truth is the core of evangelization and constitutes its essential content ... The vigor of the faith of millions of people will depend on a lively knowledge of this*

*truth. On such knowledge will also depend the strength of their adhesion to the Church and their active presence as Christians in the world. From it will flow options, values, attitudes, and behavior patterns that can give direction and definition to our Christian living, that can create new human beings and then a new humanity through conversion of the individuals and social conscience.*¹

Thus we celebrate with true hope the feast of Christ the King and as a practical resolution we promise to study and reflect on the mystery of Christ since Sunday after Sunday we gather together to do this. Today is like the conclusion of a world course because throughout the world the Church has shared reflections on the mystery of Christ. I am greatly pleased that this celebration of the Word of God, which constitutes a true university for this Diocese, has promoted faith in Jesus Christ and at the same time has led us to incarnate our faith in the Kingdom into the concrete reality of our nation. Those who have followed the line of thought in our Sunday homilies know that we have developed a catechesis incarnated in the reality of our country. Those who have not followed our thinking will be led to say: this preaching is political.

The Lord desires that we all understand the efforts that the Church is making to love the gospel of Christ, a gospel that enlightens and is incarnated in our reality because as John Paul II has said: *only in this way can we today adopt proper Christian attitudes* in our country.

In light of the hopes of the Church, the readings that we have just heard suggest the theme of this morning's homily: *Jesus Christ: the key and guide of our history*. This theme is suggested because: First, the kingdom of Christ is the Kingdom of God; Second, the mission of Christ is the truth; Third, the objective of Christ is the integral liberation of humankind.

The Kingdom of Christ is the Kingdom of God

First of all we establish the great truth that Jesus proclaimed as he stood before Pilate: *Rex sum ego, I am a king*. (2) The gospel brings together the promises and expectations of the whole Old Testament. According to the promise, the people awaited a Messiah-King, a descendent of David.

Saint John makes the account of Jesus' passion an account of his glorification. Despite the humiliations of Jesus' passion, John presents Jesus as one who possesses the calmness of a king. John's irony turns the scene in the Praetorium into an official statement and the enthronement of this king, Jesus. This irony is proper to Saint John and so he is seen as the ironic apostle and evangelist. With masterly irony we are told that the humiliation of Christ can be seen as the official proclamation of the greatest empire in history that Christ is the true king.

You have heard the dialogue between the powerful representative of the Roman Empire and the chained prisoner: *Are you the king of the Jews* (3). Jesus responds: *You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice* (4).

John's narration continues with the description of the crowning with thorns, placing a reed scepter in his hand, the purple cloak, a throne, the cross. In the midst of this bloodstained ceremony, a king is crowned. With the irony of a trial, Jesus, the God-man, is proclaimed: *Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews* (5). And not only of the Jews, but of all people. As we reflect on the rich content of this ceremony, as we remove the thorns and clean up the blood, it remains wonderfully clear that Christ is a king who is quite distinct from other kings of this world.

Secondly because the reign of Christ is the reign of God. Speaking about this first idea which I am going to explain in more detail, I have said that Jesus' kingdom is the kingdom of God. Pilate does not fear this king who is mocked nor is he afraid of some political rival. In fact, Pilate seems to laugh at Jesus. But he also perceives the presence of a divine mystery in Jesus. Pilate's wife told him: *Have nothing to do with this righteous man. I suffered much in a dream today because of him* (6). So Pilate's fears increased when he hears Jesus speak about the Son of God. (7) In the polytheistic mentality of a Roman, Jesus appears to be a God who has fallen out of nowhere and so Pilate asks: *Where are you from?* (8). Nevertheless Christ knows and we, as believers, also know the origin of this King.

In today's first reading (9), we find an example of classic prophecy, that which the elders guarded as promise: the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and majesty. This power and majesty is derived from the throne that Daniel presents to us as the seat of the Ancient One (10) who represents the venerable, divine Father from whom originates the Kingdom that is not of this earth. The Kingdom does not have an earthly origin.

The doxologies that are presented to us in the second reading from the book of Revelation sing the praises of a kingdom that is not of this world: *to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen* (11). These words are like the sound of angels that are heard as their echoes descend to earth.

In the words of Christ we hear the very words of God: *I am the alpha and the omega, the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty* (12). As you know alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. Thus this passage is telling us that Christ understands all the readings and all the Scriptures and that he is the secret behind all that exists ... he is the beginning and the end. When the natural world began, Christ existed and when history comes to an end, Christ will continue to exist. Human history, which humankind glorifies, is nothing but a speck in the sun of eternity and Christ is eternal.

The Second Vatican Council speaks about the Kingdom of God and states: The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in its very foundation. (13) The Lord Jesus set it on its course by preaching the Good News, that is, the coming of the Kingdom of God, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (14) Before all things, however, the Kingdom is clearly visible in the very Person of Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, who came "to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (15).

Here we find an expression of the very interesting relationship between the Kingdom of God established by Christ and the Kingdom that the Church serves. What is the relation between the Kingdom of God and the Church? The Church is not the Kingdom of God in its totality. The Church is a servant of the Kingdom of God, proclaims the Kingdom of God and even more beautifully, the Church says she *receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom* (16).

My beloved Catholics, look at the honor that the Church has as she gives witness to the fact that the Kingdom of God is among us. The Church herself is a small seed and humankind is much greater than the Church. Nevertheless, the Church possesses the seed of the Kingdom of God. The more Christian we become the greater witness we give to the great truth that the Kingdom of Heaven has come down to earth to become the kingdom of women and men.

What, then, is the relation between the Kingdom of God and historical kingdoms? According to the Jewish mentality there was a struggle between God who reigned and the devil who desired to overthrow the Kingdom of God. The history of Israel presents this scene to us as a struggle between God and the devil. At times the kingdoms of the earth become instruments of the kingdom of hell that is opposed to God. This belief and hope was brought to light in order to encourage people during times of persecution.

Before recounting the praises of the King of heaven who comes in the midst of clouds, the prophecy in the first reading speaks to us about the history of Israel, especially in regard to the four empires that dominated Israel: Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian Empire which ruled over Palestine and led the children of the kingdom into exile. Later the Babylonians were defeated by the Medes and the poor people of Israel were ruled by another nation. Then the Persians, under the providential leadership of Cyrus, came to power. Under Persian rule the Israelites were given freedom and allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. But once again Jerusalem was invaded, this time by the Greeks and Alexander.

Daniel refers to the statue of Nebuchadnezzar in order to represent him in a famous vision. The statue had a head of gold, a body of bronze, arms of iron and feet of clay. (17) A stone from the mountain was hurled at the statue and destroyed the statue of the four empires and this stone began to grow larger and became a mountain which is the Kingdom of God reigning over the crushed empire.

The prophet Daniel also presents us with the scene of a tempest and four beasts arising from the sea. (18) One in the form of a lion, another in the form of a bear, another in the form of a leopard and finally a fourth beast which he does not name but classifies in the following way: iron teeth and iron feet, blood-thirsty and devouring flesh. (19) This apocalyptic mystery is a description of the persecution of the believers in God. Then there arises above the animals, now slaughtered, the throne of the powerful One, the throne upon which the king who comes into this world will take his seat. Once again God triumphs over the historical empires.

What is today's second reading from the book of Revelation telling us about the rule of the kings of the earth? *Every eye will see him and even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him* (20). Revelation was written in a different era and was written in encourage Christians who were suffering during the time of the Roman persecution ...now it is not the ancient empires that are a problem. During Jesus' time the Roman Empire governed Palestine, Christians in Rome, as well as the Holy Land, were persecuted. In order to encourage Christians not to betray their faith, Saint John describes for them the destiny of the Kingdom of God and the fragile destiny of the kingdoms of this earth. Christ will be seen even by those who pierced him. (21) The Romans who were instruments in Jesus' crucifixion will see him and the people who despised him will weep and mourn. This is the outcome of history. The Lord is the Lord of history, King forever.

The gospel of Saint John was written in another context but one that is similar to the book of Revelation. The gospel narrates the passion of Christ which took place under the rule of Pontius Pilate, during the time of the arrogance and pride of the Roman Empire. John's narration, however, concludes with the Lord's resurrection and encourages Christians to be faithful to this King whom no one can conquer. Those who pierced him and nailed him to the cross, those who opened his side and spat on him and crowned him with thorns ... they too will see. How terrible will be the encounter with the King for those who have acted in this manner!

The gospel, the reflection of the Christian community, records these immortal words. Pilate asks: *are you the king of the Jews* (22)? Jesus responds: *My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews* (23). Jesus was a Jew yet nevertheless he says: *If I were king they would protect me from the Jews*. A great commentator explains the meaning of these words and says that Jesus could not speak about a Jewish Messiah. He was a king, superior to his own country --- a king but certainly one whose kingdom did not belong to this world. Jesus did not want to separate himself from the other kingdoms but wanted to state that his kingdom did not consist of political system and had nothing to do with armies which he did not possess. There was no reason to fear his diplomacy ... there was none. Jesus was not a political power and so there was no reason for fear.

Pilate, a diplomat and politician, found no reason to condemn Jesus. Jesus is condemned because of the caprice of the Jews who used the political argument: *If you release him, you are not a friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar. We will inform higher authorities if you release Jesus and you will be removed from your position* (24). Thus, to protect his political position, Pilate acts most unjustly. But it should remain very clear that Christ, our Lord, has proclaimed that his kingdom is not political, rather his kingdom has descended from heaven with special powers from God in order to subject all the empires of the world to the law of God, to the truth of God. Jesus' kingdom has no limits or boundaries because his kingdom is in the midst of all people. His kingdom is not of this world but is in the world. His kingdom is not of this world but yet reigns over the world and as a consequence governments and legislatures must submit themselves to him.

How easy it is to understand here our Christian duty, our pastoral and ecclesial task. How many reflections of Christian groups appear at times to be political analysis? They have forgotten that their strength is not found there. How many Christians have human respect for political parties and political organizations and as they associate themselves with these groups give no importance to the fact that these same groups do not respect the Church? How many times are we forming political groups rather than Christian communities? We must remember that the position of Jesus before Pilate and all the empires and political systems of the world is one of maintaining autonomy. The King came down from heaven and incarnated himself in the world in order to transcend the kingdoms of this world. Jesus does not identify himself with these kingdoms.

My sisters and brothers, especially you who are members of the base Christian communities, pastoral ministers, priests ... we have no reason to beg before politicians because we have a light that illuminates all political systems. Let us not take sides with any one sector. Let us maintain the autonomy of Jesus who even though he was shackled was able to say in front of Pilate: *There is no reason to fear my kingdom but it is superior to yours* (an adaptation of John 18:36) or as we sang on the feast of the Epiphany when Herod feared that the child who was born would take over his empire: *Do not fear Herod, this child does not come to eliminate temporal kingdoms, but to establish an eternal kingdom.*²

It is true that we cannot separate ourselves from the political, social and economic realities of this world but we must be like the light which illuminates without becoming contaminated by these realities. We must penetrate these realities and make them more human and more Christian, but we must also preserve the autonomy of the sun and the light. Therefore let us now reflect on my other two ideas.

His mission is the truth

Why can Jesus say: *My kingdom does not belong to this world* (25) and yet today we proclaim Christ as the universal King? The second point is that his mission is the truth. What an interesting dialogue! It is as though the question of Pilate distorts the horizon but does not destroy it, rather it makes it all the more clear: *Then you are a King ?* (26) Jesus responds: *You say I am a king. For this was I born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.*

In the Biblical sense, the truth can be seen as that which is in opposition to a lie but it can also mean fidelity. The word *truth* takes on this meaning because we see that Jesus gave an eloquent testimony of fidelity to God. The Bible calls Christ the Amen of God. (27) In him are fulfilled, even to the last iota, all the promises that God made to women and men. Christ is the promise fulfilled. Christ is the fidelity of God. Christ is the truth. He is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end of all that exists. No one knows the depths of the reality of things like the King of truth. Therefore no one can call Christ a liar. Saint John says: *There is no need to tell him [Christ] what is within a person because he knows what is in the depths of every person* (28).

How wonderful it had to be to see Jesus when people murmured at his thoughts. He looked at them and said: *Hypocrites, what are you thinking ?* Before the truth, intrigue is put to shame. When the gospel begins to recount the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, the eternal Word of God, the Word that contains everything created and that which is infinite, we are told that the Word became flesh. Then Saint John says: *We saw his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth* (29). How wonderful is the personified figure of truth. Christ, the eternal Word made flesh! There is no greater friend than the sincere person and who is more sincere and straightforward than Christ? He is the truth.

Truth is also revelation. Everything that God wanted to reveal to people is contained in Christ. When Jesus said farewell to his disciples he said: *I no longer call you slaves because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father* (30). There are no secrets for those Christians who want to love this witness of the truth: Jesus Christ has brought us everything from the heart of God, everything that must be known in order to live. Blessed are those who have faith because they believe in the truth. Cursed are those without faith, skeptics and those who have separated themselves from Christ because only he can give the light of truth.

In today's second reading, the book of Revelation refers to Jesus Christ as *the faithful witness* (31), the faithful witness who can say to Nicodemus: *we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen* (32). We say things that are distinct. We are witnesses of God's truth. My beloved sisters and brothers, what is our attitude before the truth? I am deeply impressed by that moment when Christ stands alone before the world figured by Pilate. The truth is left alone, his own followers were afraid. Truth is fearlessly daring and only heroes can follow the truth. So much so that Peter, who said he would die if need be, fled like a coward and Christ stands alone.

Let us not be afraid to be left alone if it is for the sake of the truth. Let us be afraid to be demagogues, coveting people's false flattery. If we do not tell them the truth, we commit the worst sin: betraying the truth and betraying people. Christ would rather be left alone but able to say before the world figured in Pilate: *everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice* (33).

Here we see Pilate's attitude which is revealed in his own question. When Jesus says: *For this was I born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belong to the*

truth listens to my voice (34), Pilate with all the pride and contempt of a haughty Romans says: *What is truth?* Pilate does an about face but continues the process and has Jesus whipped and then hands him over to be executed. Pilate was so close to the truth but because of his skepticism and pride and rejection of God he did not know how to take advantage of the opportunity when he was face to face with the truth.

At this time when we are not lacking in political opinions, it would be good to remember that Christ alone possesses the truth and therefore in many different ways our truth can be biased. I bring here a text from the Council which speaks about the diversity of opinion in political matters. This thought is very apt for our situation. Before Christ, the only one who possesses the whole truth, we, as men and women, possess faith and thus share in Christ's truth but as we apply the truth to the concrete realities of history we see that this can be done in different ways.

Listen to the words of the Church that were expressed in the Council: *in virtue of her mission and nature she is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic or social system, the Church by her very universality can be a very close bond between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission* (35).

It must be kept in mind that all those who have opinions in political matters should be humble and listen to the voices of others: *Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, however, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the Gospel message. Hence it is necessary for people to remember that no one is allowed in the aforementioned situations to appropriate the Church's authority for his opinion. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good* (36).

My sisters and brothers, how appropriate are these words when we see so much fanaticism, people who believe that they alone have the solution to our country's present situation. We hear words like: *The government and some government officials know nothing. We alone know what must be done while these others do not know what they are saying.* Among all of us we have to seek a solution and those who are wedded to one way of thinking are sinning against the common good. Christians who have different political opinions cannot appropriate for themselves the Church's thinking as though this was meant only for them. The sun of Christ's truth is so powerful that it can illuminate ideological pluralism and here I refer not only to the political arena but also include science and art and technology which by their very nature possess their own proper autonomy.

I believe that all of this is of great consequence and great transcendence especially when we attempt to monopolize the truth. Only Christ has a monopoly on the truth and only he can say: *everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice* (37). The rest of us have to respect the opinions and options of others and trust in people because they are children of God and perhaps have greater abilities than we.

Christ's objective is the integral liberation of all people

The objective of Christ the King is the integral liberation of all people. Commentators present a beautiful interpretation of the first reading which refers to the Son of Man who comes on the clouds

of heaven and draws near to the throne of God (38): the one who comes is the glorified Son of Man, not Christ individually but Christ with all Christians. The whole mystical body, all those who have believed in him, all those who died and were faithful in following Jesus ... all these people will be glorified in the one head who is Christ. The mystical body of Christ, composed of those who followed him here on earth will be the glory of the heavenly Church at the time of its consummation. My sisters and brothers, if we are saved, we will have the privilege of being united with the Son of Man who is glorified as the Son of God. Let us strive to be faithful so that we might merit this dignity which has no equal.

In the second reading the book of Revelation speaks to us about the different fruits of the Kingdom of God which Christ established on earth when he was called the firstborn of the dead. (39) These words seem to tell us that Christ is like the first flower that blooms in a newly planted garden or like the first fruits harvested from a tree that was planted and tended with great care. The Church produces the fruits of the resurrection. The first one to rise, the firstborn of the dead, the first fruit of Easter is Christ the Lord. This title moves me and all of us to follow the firstborn of the dead. We, his sisters and brothers, are engendered for the glory of Easter and the resurrection. The risen Christ has placed in the world the principle of immortality. Blessed are those who believe in the death and resurrection of Christ because they have received in their hearts the seeds of eternal life.

The Apocalypse says: *He loves us.* (40) This is the first cause. God loved us and his love took concrete human form in Christ our Lord. Christ standing before the sick, before the blind, before the crippled, before the sinner ... this is the God of mercy, his love walking on this earth. Who does not approach with tenderness the Lord's love found in Christ Jesus? He lives on earth and loves us and by that love, says the book of Revelation: *he has freed us from our sins by his blood.* (41) He knew that the Father was asking him for his own blood as the price of forgiveness and he did not shrink from the dreadful sufferings of Good Friday. He surrendered himself. *It was our infirmities that he bore* (42), says the prophet and God charged him the price of our liberation. No liberation is more profound than Christ's. How ridiculous are liberations that talk only about having higher wages, about having money and better prices! Liberations that talk only about political change, about who is in the government ... such liberations are only talking about bits and pieces of the great liberation, the one that paid for the root of our ills and all our injustices. If the earth's liberations are not in conformity with the great liberation of Christ, the great Liberator, then they are mutilated, not genuine liberations but only parts of liberation.*

The book of Revelation continues with the following brilliant words: *he has made us into a kingdom of priests for his God and Father.* (43) How great is the dignity of Christians, a dignity which forms us into a kingdom. All of us, if we follow Christ and believe in him and are converted ... we will be made into his kingdom. His kingdom will have no end (44) and we will have eternal life in the kingdom. This is the great promise and our great hope. Not only does Christ make us subjects in his kingdom but we are made priests, that is, he shares with us the dignity that baptism conferred upon us when we became a priestly people. From the perspective of our proper role in the world, we are priests who consecrate the world to God. The lawyer, doctor, engineer, government official, worker, day laborer, woman in the market place, student ... when these people live out the beauty of redemption that was conferred on them at the time of baptism, when they live as a priestly people, then they consecrate their profession, their clients and their work to God.

This profound theology can cleanse our country of the filth that has stained it due to evil government officials and servants. How different El Salvador would be ... indeed, we would not be living in this great crisis if we shared the wonderful teaching of Christ the King, the teaching that all

the people of El Salvador have been formed into the Kingdom of God, a priestly people so that we might live with dignity and share this dignity in our homes by not betraying our spouse, by not having children out of marriage, by respecting women, by not prostituting life and destroying life, thus making life a source of sin. Redemption means that rather than stain the gift of life with sin, we see the gift of life as good and make holy the life that has been given to us.

Let us make ourselves worthy of this greatness because the feast of Christ the King does not mean that we come together to simply greet Christ because he is King. Rather we come together and say: Lord, your kingdom has truly complicated our life because we have been given a great responsibility and must therefore make you reign here in our midst.

Life of the Church

I invite you to reflect briefly on the reality of our Church. Our actions this week correspond to the plans of God who wishes to make his Church the seed of his kingdom.

Next Saturday the Diocese of Santiago de María will begin the jubilee celebration that commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of its creation by the Holy See. The anniversary Mass will be celebrated one week from today, December 2nd, at 10:00am. Those who are able to join together in unity with our sister diocese will indeed be doing a good act.

Wednesday of this week is the anniversary of the death of Father Ernesto Barrera and we will commemorate his death by celebrating Mass in the parish of San Sebastian at 6:00pm.

In the Chancery we have held several meetings to enliven the faith of our Church. At the meeting of the Pastoral Council we were able to see the lively faith of the Church in different vicariates. At the meeting of the Priests Senate we affirmed the fidelity of so many priests who are ministers of the true Kingdom of Christ.

In Soyapango, in the village of El Carmen, I visited the parish of Santo Tomás. This evening I will visit the parish of San Francisco in Mejicanos. Today I will also celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in the church of Corazón de María. We have seen these churches flourish in their convictions as Christians.

Speaking about Confirmation, I recently heard a statement that demonstrates a clear misunderstanding. Someone stated that in the Archdiocese the sacrament of Confirmation is no longer celebrated and so people have to go to another diocese. This is a misunderstanding because we simply desire that children receive the sacrament of Confirmation with sufficient knowledge. If some individuals do not wish to abide by these pastoral demands (which are not mine but demands that arise from the Church's renewal) I want to tell you that you are not acting on your child's behalf by having them confirmed at an age when they do not understand the meaning of this action. Every pastor and every vicariate is setting aside days for the celebration of the sacrament of Confirmation. You can obtain this information in your parishes but please do not say that we do not celebrate the sacrament of Confirmation in San Salvador. We celebrate this sacrament in a very orderly and a very fruitful manner. People who do not want to collaborate in this process have closed themselves off to the Church's renewal. The Archdiocesan magazine *Busqueda* has been re-edited and there you will find an explanation of the catechesis of the sacrament of Confirmation. Those who wish to have a more profound understanding of this sacrament are able to obtain this information in *Busqueda*.

In the Vicariate of Chalatenango the ministers have come up with a very original idea, namely, the preparation of delayed vocations. Those men who are older in age but experience a call to priesthood but did not have the opportunity to go to school can receive preparatory courses in Chalatenango and from there we will see what happens. The Lord inspires us with ways to prepare men for the priesthood.

In this same line of thought I was most happy with the results of the gathering of young men in El Seminario San José. Twenty-five graduates from high school have requested entrance into the seminary. I received a very enthusiastic telegram from Tepecoyo which stated: *training priests for the service of the Church has more value than gifting the Church thousands of sacred vessels. We pray for the success of your gathering and we unite with you in offering our sacrifices and prayers today and always.* This was signed by the Choir of Medella Milagrosa and the musical group Cristo Joven.

I was pleased to participate in a gathering of the Catechumenate Movement in the Instituto Rinaldi where groups from the Archdiocese and the Diocese of Santiago de María came together. I expressed my hope that these persons who dedicate themselves to understanding more profoundly our catechesis will place themselves at the service of others.

I want to correct something I said last week concerning the work of La Hospital de Divinia Providencia. They have bought four parcels of land in Santa Tecla at the cost of 525,000 colones. The sale of the steel reinforcement rods produced 300,000.00 colones which means that 225,000.00 colones must still be obtained. I also want to inform you that the boundaries of this land are in litigation but we hope that this dispute can be resolved in an intelligent manner. We will continue to inform you about this process.

I want to thank and congratulate the editors of UCA because they have published an edition of the document of Puebla. We hope that the price will be reasonable since this was our objective and we also hope that every home will have a copy of this beautiful document that describes the Church's pastoral activity in Latin America and that was written by the bishops in Puebla, Mexico.

Tomorrow the religious women who work in our parishes and towns and villages will begin their retreat. I ask you to pray for them so that each day they might be better instruments of God's mercy among those people where there is no priest as well as in those areas where these women collaborate with their pastors.

I want to advise you that next Sunday we will celebrate the Eucharist in the cathedral and there we will initiate a new Liturgical Year with the celebration of the First Sunday of Advent. We want to thank the pastor of the Basilica for his hospitality and if we have to return here because of some further occupation of the cathedral we will make such arrangements. I hope that the popular organizations understand that their prestige is damaged when they occupy the churches. When I was in San Miguel I did not hear a single word that approved of their action in this regard but rather there was much resentment concerning the occupation of the Cathedral there. While we have not experienced this same resentment here in San Salvador yet people are not pleased with the occupation of the Cathedral. We will have to begin again encouraging people to worship in the Cathedral because our weekly services have been interrupted. The popular organizations are not aware of the great harm that they cause by these actions and strategies. They might have good objectives that we fully support but when they act in this way that offends the sensitivities of our people then it becomes difficult to continue to support them in their objectives.

The Chancery has been asked to intervene in the matter of the abduction of Jaime Battle. We are willing to do this but we also know that such an intervention must also be accepted by the other side. I therefore echo the words that Jaime's family wrote to the FPL which organization is known publicly to be the author of this abduction: *we absolve ourselves from the absolute silence and reserve that from the beginning you demanded of us. Therefore by this means his family appeals to your conscience and asks for his release. The amount of money that you have demanded from us is beyond our means and the amount that we have offered is very limited as a result of the present economic situation ... a situation created by the prevailing climate of violence in the country. Contrary to what you state in a letter that was supposedly written by Jaime, you, the abductors, are the cause of the anguish, suffering and pains of his wife and children and mother and brothers. His grieving family is willing to do anything to rescue their beloved Jaime and your intransigence in the negotiations has caused much pain. You can find further information in our letter which is at your disposal.*³ If my intervention can be helpful then with great pleasure I once again state that I am willing to help in this matter.

We are greatly disturbed by what occurred yesterday in Aguilares. Yesterday, November 24th, Daniel Navarro Cruz was arrested by members of the Guardia Nacional and there is great fear concerning his fate. He was arrested at 11:00am in Aguilares where he was delivering a pair of shoes and a watch. He was taken prisoner by the Guardia Nacional and brought to an unknown destination. We would like to believe that these things no longer occurred here and so we want to tell the National Government that such actions make it difficult to believe in the good will of the government. Hopefully they will be exacting.*

Everyone is aware of the fact the FAPU has placed before me a series of questions. I want to respond to these questions but I ask you to come to the Secretariat of Communication where we can give extensive data concerning these questions. There is no need to act like demagogues when all of this can be resolved in a private and serious interview.*

Uniting ourselves to the universal Church we ask you to pray for the Pope who in his desire for unity will visit the Orthodox Patriarch Demetrius of Istanbul at the end of this month. At the same time he will also speak with the President of the British Methodist Conference. We also unite to him the ecumenical efforts that we are undertaking here and that give us much hope. Hopefully one day this unity will become a reality, the unity that Jesus himself referred to when he spoke of one flock and one shepherd. (45)

As many of you know, the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua published a Pastoral Letter concerning the commitment of the Christian community. I want to refer to their words because I believe they are very enlightening for our situation here in El Salvador: *We have confidence that the revolutionary process will be original, creative and profoundly national and therefore will not be imitative.*⁴ I would like to say the same to all those who are engaged in the transformation of our country. Those who question the motives of others must ask themselves if they really desire a solution that comes from the hearts of our people or are they struggling to bring about something that is imposed from outside? Like the bishops of Nicaragua I also tell you to fully support the social, economic, and political transformation that in light of the gospel arises from the depths of our people. This will signal the true liberation of our country and thus will be opposed to any form of imperialism that some might desire to impose on us.*

The bishops of Nicaragua then continue: *We hope for a process that moves steadily toward the development of a full and authentic Nicaraguan society, neither capitalist nor dependent nor totalitarian*⁵. Remember that the Church believes that no historical revolution has the ability to

*exhaust the infinite possibilities of the justice and solidarity that is so characteristic of the Kingdom of God.*⁶ This is what we have spoken about today. The Kingdom of Christ is not identified with the kingdom of Pilate or with any other kingdom but rather maintains a higher level, superior to any historical realization. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, do not doubt the Church, do not doubt her because she does not commit herself to any political regimen. She must always maintain herself above these realities in order to be able to point out better paths, to point out the fact that the Kingdom of God will come to perfect that which might appear at the moment to be the most perfect system. Systems can always be made better and this is the mission of the Church: like Jesus who stood before Pilate (46) so too the Church points out the fact that the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world because it transcends all kingdoms and makes all kingdoms more perfect than the most perfect kingdom of this world.

In Honduras a Jesuit priest, Father Guadalupe Carney Handley, was expelled. The Episcopal Conference and the Society of Jesus have protested the government's action, an action which they consider unjust and arbitrary.

Events of the week

I am going to refer to an analysis made by the Central American University and use this as a framework for my comments⁷. The UCA expressed their hopes and their doubts about the real possibilities for effective action by the new government. They admit that in a period of one month after the insurrection it is not possible to pass a definitive judgment on the efficacy and dangers that could unravel the new process. The initial efforts of the younger members of the military were directed toward healing the military institution and providing the country with a solid foundation for the democratic process. But present social relationships and the correlation of power has begun to raise questions concerning presumed intentions. Some problems have arisen and I believe that at this time when together as a diocese we analyze our reality these problems must be kept in mind.

The problem of those who have disappeared. Concerning this problem UCA states: *There is a fear of trials and that such a means will definitively weaken the strength of the Armed Forces, especially at this time when they are attempting to bring about social change. It would not be unfounded to think that the repressive actions that have occurred during the past three weeks have as their fundamental objective a desire to implicate the new regimen in this violence which would then impede the trial and punishment of those responsible for past violence.*⁸

Like the statement published in *La Prensa* we are also surprised that a government official stated that there are no political prisoners and that the present government is not responsible for the actions that occurred during the administration of previous presidents.⁹ I say this surprises me because this government cannot neglect to examine these actions since at least three persons have disappeared during the time of the new government. One of them is the sacristan from Soyapango and despite speaking about this week after week we have still not received any information about him. On the other hand I believe that even though the new government is not directly responsible for the arrest and the disappearance of political prisoners that occurred during previous regimes, yet they must be held responsible to the people and provide a satisfactory answer concerning the fate of these people. Also they should sanction those responsible for torture, illegal arrests, etc.*

Perhaps I am too worldly in regard to this matter but it seems to me to be very logical and effective for the investigating commission to begin by judging and determining the responsibility of previous presidents and commanders of the Security Forces during those years.* I believe that this commission is attempting to investigate what is known about these cases. At the same time it is not

true that there are no political prisoners in our jails. There are political prisoners and some of these people have been accused of common crimes connected with political actions. It seems that here we have a technical impediment that lawyers and judges must quickly settle so that we can resolve this very sensitive problem that our nation confronts. Our Legal Aid group and the Commission on Human Rights have presented a lengthy list of these cases to the courts.

The past week our Legal Aid group presented files that contained important documents concerning two hundred five cases of persons who have disappeared¹⁰. The Chancery has expressed its solidarity with the family members of these persons and asks: *where are they?* We await a satisfactory response and also the indemnification of the families of those persons who have disappeared and are now presumed to have been assassinated.*

I have also some very important news in this regard. Everyone is aware of the discovery of a decomposed body on the road leading to Chorros ... this body was missing several internal organs. Various skeletons were also found in the mountains near the bridge of Cuscatlán. But I have some further news.

Two lawyers acting on behalf of a *campesino* who was arrested on October 5th and acting in accord with the law, discovered on the 20th of this month a basement in the headquarters of Treasury Police. The statement of these lawyers reads: *As a result of the strange situation we found at the headquarters of the Treasury Police, we began a personal inspection of all the installations of the Security Forces. During the inspection we arrived at their installation identified as the fourth position. This is located behind the installation and during our inspections we noticed that the floor made a strange noise, as though there was a hollow space underneath. The floor was covered with a rug and some other things and so we asked that these be removed. Then we noticed a rectangular grille which when lifted up revealed a room that was completely sealed. It was a circular room located beneath the floor. There one was able to descend a wooden ladder and enter the sealed room.*

The lawyers climbed down the ladder and personally inspected the area. Using flashlights they saw some words on the walls: *“Centeno died here” (a cross was carved beneath his name). “Roberto.” “Mario Hernandez was here.” “I am leaving but my hatred remains!” “It is certain that evil will always be present!” There was another cross and some vertical lines which seemed to indicate the passing of days or some other accounting of time.*

The place had a very humid odor, like a crypt and led the Judge and his secretary to believe that this place was a clandestine prison in which persons were detained under the most inhuman conditions. We ought to point out that the officials denied any knowledge of the existence of this place and yet we were treated very courteously and with great deference. We believe that with this report we are fulfilling Article 24 of our political Constitution which is always valid and establishes the right of citizens to watch over the fulfillment of the Constitution.

In this regard the lawyers also stated that the books that account for the prisoners held by the Security Forces are not reliable because *we proceeded to inspect the books of the Guardia Nacional to see if they had entered on January 20th the names of those persons arrested in San Antonio Abad, in the religious center El Despertar. The names of the forty young people did not appear in these books. Yet it is public knowledge that the Guardia Nacional handed their names over to the Criminal Court. This is a very valid report that the investigating commission now possesses.**

Together with this campaign on behalf of those who have disappeared, another campaign has started on behalf of the family members of those persons who have been assassinated because they were members of ORDEN, PCN or some other group of the Security Forces. We believe that it is just that the cause of the death of these persons be investigated and the same justice should be applied here as in other areas of our life together. The cleansing of the Security Forces should not be conditioned by the carrying out of this justice. It is just but it is also just that the Security Forces be purified as soon as possible.

If through the application of justice we attempt to find the cause of the evil that surrounds us then I believe that the new government should not stop their search for this cause until they find the ultimate cause of the injustice that reigns in our present social situation. We have always thought that the violence that was carried out by the Security Forces had deep criminal roots, namely, social injustice.*

Here we continue for a little longer with the analysis of UCA and their statement about the great challenge of the new government. They state: *a problem cannot be resolved with revolutionary cries or by destructive means because by prolonging these violent actions the salvation of our country will become almost unattainable, definitively unattainable*¹¹. I once again call upon all those who are acting violently and who allow this violence to persist to use common sense. We are not going to build our country by destroying it. Rather we must seek out the root of evil and work together to eradicate these roots.

The transformation of our country can only be brought about with significant and radical structural changes. The analysis of UCA continues: *Some have called these radical changes a necessary revolution. They refer to a necessary revolution because this revolution must be characterized by action and not by ideology. The phantom of ideology should put a stop to the necessity of a revolution in the political and economic arena. Our country that is organized to benefit a small minority should not be organized on the foundation of some abstract common good which frequently hides the evil of domination and exploitation. Rather our country should be organized on the foundation of development and full liberation for the popular classes which are now oppressed. Such a perspective implies a radical change in many of our institutions which have been designed and utilized for the contrary.*¹² Here we see the great work and great challenge of the new government and the challenge of all those who are engaged in the struggle for the true liberation of our country. Our social, political and economic structures must be reorganized. Let us beg God, my beloved sisters and brothers, to not allow our change to consist of patchwork. Rather let our change reflect the words of Jesus when he spoke about new wine in new wineskins. (47)

We wish to greet the appearance in its fifth stage of the publication *Independiente*. . Hopefully this will be a light of freedom among our people.

The situation of ANDES, and public transportation, and Popladores de Turgurios are on the path to being resolved. There have been demonstrations but these have been carried out without any incident. Press conferences and statements from different political sectors have been expressed with complete freedom and this clearly demonstrates that there is a new political climate. I therefore call upon all professionals and politicians to join together in lifting up their voices and opinions on behalf of the common good and the renewal of our people. This is not the time for passivity but rather the time when all of us, even those considered the least among the people of El Salvador, must contribute our part to the reconstruction of our nation.

There are complaints of violence in the areas where coffee and cotton and sugar-cane are being harvested. It is said that some of these crops are being destroyed. I want to remind you of the wise words of the Pope who spoke to the farmers in the United States and said that one of their greatest obligations was to care for the land that God has given to all people so that future generations might benefit from the earth. The Pope said: *You are stewards of some of the most important resources God has given to the world. Therefore conserve the land well, so that your children's children and generations after them will inherit an even richer land than was entrusted to you.*¹³ My dear sisters and brothers, I believe that the justice that you seek with regard to wages must not be obtained by destroying the shared resources that benefit the whole nation, rather you must obtain this in some other way.

Thanks to God the impasse at the University has been resolved. I want to congratulate the new authorities and call upon them to make this institution a place of higher education where the hope of the nation can shine forth. May it not continue to be a center of confusion where there is more politics than science and study.

I conclude by reading two letters ... one thought from each one ... because at this time the words appear to be very significant. The first letter is from a friend of mine, a government official who writes: *a few hours ago (it is now 8:00pm) I explained to my companion the serious obstacles that I have detected and that seem to be in operation here, namely, the denial of justice to those who seek it and the fact that the courts seem to be creating a common grave for the humble prisoners who were cruelly assassinated or who have savagely disappeared. Bishop, I feel terribly alone and frustrated. I have called upon God's strength, the love of my wife and children, the love of my neighbors and asked them to remove this feeling of bitterness and sadness and depression. My beloved government officials, do not spread these feelings of pessimism because now is not the time to rest since there is much work that must be done and many changes that must be undertaken. Do not become slaves to legalities when the nation has lived through realities that trampled upon our own constitutional law. We do not have to be slaves of some magical formula but rather we must seek an honest and just solution for our poor country.*

The other letter was written by a bus driver: *I am intrigued by your insistence on the restructuring of the Security Forces. He says that he works as a bus driver: there is nothing outstanding about my work but rather I live a very ordinary and routine life that provides me with the miracle of subsistence. The National Police, however, which until the present time have ruled in our midst, show little responsibility and seem to be in their totality plagued by a system of bribery. This seems to come to them very naturally and has grave consequences on our precarious economic situation which has already been torn to pieces. You are aware of the high costs of all that is necessary for this work.*

We can add here the anguished voices of those people who cry out from their huts: *We are living a life of misery and each day we sink deeper and deeper into a situation of desperation. We do not have clean water or sewers. We do not have garbage services or doctors or medicine. We have nothing. We live on the cliffs or beside the rivers together with garbage and all forms of pestilence. We are the victims of abuse and social injustice.*

All of this cries out before the reality of our people. This is the framework in which we are celebrating the feast of Christ the King, the King of justice, the King of law and the King of human dignity. Therefore those who govern have a great challenge thrust on them not only because of the suffering of the people but above all because of the justice of God, who made us all equal, in his image, sharers in the dignity of Christ, the Redeemer, so that we might enjoy with him the same

happiness while making this earth an antechamber of the kingdom beyond. The feast of Christ the King fills us with hope because he lives. With our prayer, our work and our solidarity and relying on our faith and hope, we will continue to seek a better world.*

¹ Discourse of John Paul II at the opening of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla (28 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 1979.

² *Crudelis Herodes*, a hymn for vespers in the liturgy for the Epiphany.

³ *La Prensa Gráfica*, 23 November 1979.

⁴ *Compromiso cristiano para una Nicaragua nueva*, Pastoral Letter of the Episcopal Conference of Nicaragua (17 November 1979), *ECA* 374 (1979), p. 1105.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1105.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1104.

⁷ See “Pronunciamento del Consejo Superior Universitario de la Universidad José Simeón Cañas sobre la nueva situación del pas tras el quince de octubre”, *ECA* 372/373 (1979), pp. 849-862.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 853.

⁹ Declarations of Dr Guillermo Manuel Ungo in Costa Rica. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 November 1979.

¹⁰ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 23 November 1979.

¹¹ “Pronunciamento del Consejo...” *doc.cit.*, p. 856.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 856-857.

¹³ Homily of John Paul II in the Mass celebrated for “Living History Farms” in Des Moines (4 October 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 21 October 1979.

Marginal References (1) QP 20; (2) Jn 18,37; (3) Jn 18,33; (4) Jn 18,37; (5) Jn 19,19; (6) Mt 27,19; (7) Jn 19,7-8; (8) Jn 19,9; (9) Dt 7,13b; (10) Dt 7,13c; (11) Rv 1,6; (12) Rv 1,8; (13) LG 5; (14) Mk 1,15; (15) LG 5; (16) LG 5; (17) Dt 2,31-35; (18) Dt 7,2-12; (19) Dt 7,7; (20) Rv 1,7; (21) Rv 1,7; (22) Jn 18,37; (23) Jn 18,36; (24) Jn 19,12; (25) Jn 18,36; (26) Jn 18,37; (27) Rv 3,14; (28) Jn 2,25; (29) Jn 1,14; (30) Jn 15,15; (31) Rv 1,5; (32) Jn 3,11; (33) Jn 18,37; (34) Jn 18,38; (35) GS 42; (36) GS 43; (37) Jn 18,37; (38) Dt 7,13; (39) Rv 1,5a; (40) Rv 1,5b; (41) Rv 1,5c; (42) Is 53,4-5; (43) Rv 1,6; (44) Lk 1,33; (45) Jn 10,16; (46) Jn 18,36; (47) Mk 2,22.