

GOD WISHES TO SAVE US THROUGH MARY

**Fourth Sunday of Advent
December 23, 1979**

Micah 5:2-5
Hebrews 10:5-10
Luke 1:39-45

My sisters and brothers, four seminarians have just been called to receive what are called “ministries,” that is, two authorizations that the Church confers upon members of the community who have been capacitated to undertake the ministry of lector and acolyte. These four young men are an image of the Church that desires to serve ... they are ministers of service.

Together with these young men, as though wrapping them with strength and tenderness and pastoral love, are the central figures of this Fourth Sunday of Advent: two pregnant women, Elizabeth and Mary. These two women were made fruitful through a miracle. Elizabeth, elderly and sterile, is in her sixth month of pregnancy and will be the mother of the Precursor. Mary, without losing her virginity and through the power of the Holy Spirit, has conceived the One who is to be born in Bethlehem, the Redeemer of humankind. Mary is the beautiful figure of Advent

As a great honor to women I want to say that every pregnant woman is Advent. She proclaims that a life is about to enter the world. Therefore, how is it possible that the Church would defame and abuse the person of women? On the contrary, the Church extols and exalts and wants to defend women from anyone who would trample upon them and make the less noble.

In Advent we are presented with two figures. Mary, pregnant and about to be the mother of Jesus and the Church, fertile, like Mary, with so many children ... the Church, also virgin and mother, is preparing to give birth in eternity to the definitive Church of heaven. These two figures give meaning to the Christmas preparations that take place in the hearts of Christians: the coming of the life of God to become the life of men and women and the second coming of Jesus who will come in the splendor of his glory and bring to perfection the definitive Church. Christianity moves between these two Advents, these two comings of life. Mary is highlighted in the first coming of Christ but her mission is not completed there. Rather her mission continues throughout the long history of Christianity. She accompanies the ministers of the Church: the work of the apostles, the bishops, priests, religious women and men, parents ... all those who throughout the course of the centuries create the Church. Mary is the mother of all the fruitfulness that we, humble ministers of the gospel, attempt to plant and make fruitful in the People of God.

Today, as we express the Church's service in the call of these four young men, we are exhorted to enliven our love for the Virgin and to experience her as proclaimed in the document of Puebla: *the star of evangelization that continually renews the Church* (1).

Today's homily is entitled: *through Mary God wishes to save us in our history*. I will develop the following three points: First, Jesus is the salvation of God in history; Second, through Mary we have Jesus; Third, Mary continues to be a sign of salvation for all ages.

Jesus is the salvation of God in history

In the gospel we are told that the fruit of Mary's womb would be given the name imposed on him by God himself. Joseph is commanded: *you are to name him Jesus* (21), a Hebrew word that means *God saves*. Jesus, God saves! Jesus is God's salvation who becomes a child in Bethlehem, who is crucified on Calvary, and who establishes the Church, prolonging the life of Jesus in history.

Jesus will save people from their sins. It is interesting to read the document of Puebla where it is said that Mary is the culminating point of history because she is united with heaven and thus brings the life of God to humanity (3). Today Mary is presented in the gospel as one filled with salvation, as one who bears salvation in her womb. As Mary arrives at the house of her cousin, Elizabeth, the sanctification of John the Baptist occurs, even though he had not yet been born: *at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy* (4). John the Baptist will be born without sin because he was sanctified by God's salvation which in the womb of Mary came to his house. Elizabeth calls Mary the mother of my Lord. (5) What a wonderful meeting between these two women. The gospel tells us that Elizabeth greeted Mary with the words: *Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled* (6). What did the Lord say to Mary? He revealed to her the plan of salvation.

The salvation that we preach in Christ's Church is the same salvation that Mary believed in and that she initiated when she gave her consent and became fruitful with God's salvation. The Church is zealous to guard Mary's belief, God's plan for human salvation, and it will not let his plan be lost in merely human plans. Rather, it must sanctify and permeate these. Every people's liberation effort will be effective and in accord with God's heart if it allows faith in God's plan to save humanity to pervade it. It is right that at this time we should greet Mary and listen to her because she tells us what God desires with regard to the liberation of our country and people. When we do this we avoid allowing ourselves to be seduced by false liberations. Thus, in the prolongation of history, we become the salvation of God who has come in the womb and the faith of Mary and who now gives life to all the earthly efforts of the people of El Salvador.

Micah, the prophet of this Sunday, refers to the saving plan of God. Micah says: *From you shall come forth for me one who is to be the ruler of Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient times* (7). The proclamation reminds us of the ancient birthplace of David. *But you, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be the ruler of Israel* (8). This is an initiative of God! In the humble village of Bethlehem where David was born, a descendent of his will be born, the one who as the protagonist will accomplish God's plan of salvation for humankind. A dynasty from which is born the king of faith and those who follow him with true faith.

The style of his liberating work is revealed in today's first reading speaks to us about the work of liberation: *Men and women, because of their sins, have been enslaved to the earth until the time when she who is to give birth has borne* (9). Another wonderful illusion to Mary. Just thirty years before this proclamation, the great prophet Isaiah stood before King Ahaz who trembled with fear before the impending invasion of Assyria and offered him a sign that revealed that God was with his people: *the virgin shall be with child and bear a son* (10). This is the marvelous sign that God's wonders are being accomplished because the one who is with child shall give birth. The prophet then announces that the time is arriving *when the slavery of all people will be destroyed*.

O how the people of El Salvador should be filled with hope during this Christmas season especially when people view the future with pessimism! If God is with us and if she who is with child reminds us that once again this year on Christmas Eve she gives us a sign that the salvation

that God desires has already become operative in our midst, then why should we be afraid? A night of hope draws near ... Christmas Eve when the one who is with child will give birth and put an end to the slaveries of the earth. People who are enslaved by the tyranny and the power of the idols of sin and passion will be freed. The prophet announces: *for now his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth* (11). Thus the prophet proclaims a universal kingdom and the offering of salvation to all those who with a sincere heart seek this salvation.

The prophecy of Micah names the one who is to be born by this mysterious woman, *he shall be peace* (12). He is peace! Why do we lack peace on earth? Because men and women have separated themselves from God and because of sin have separated themselves from their sisters and brothers. Christ is peace because he draws God close to men and women and calls all people to embrace one another. This is the salvation that God offers us.

In today's second reading we find the explanation for Christ being called the Redeemer. Jesus is the salvation of the world and as on Christmas Eve, he is presented to us as one who enters into our history. Notice how the letter to the Hebrews speaks about the wonderful moment when God entered into our history: *When Christ entered the world he said: "sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me" ... I have come to do your will ... By this "will" we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all* (13). Thus the child who is born of Mary is the flesh that God needs in order to offer a holocaust. The world began to be saved from the moment that the Word became flesh. (14) In the womb of Mary the salvation of the world has begun and this salvation will be accomplished on the cross on Calvary and, even more, when Jesus triumphs over death and is glorified in heaven. Here we are placed before the plan of salvation: Jesus comes from the Father and submits himself to the humiliation of death. He then returns to the Father bringing with him the salvation of the world. This is the saving plan of Christ, that which in theology is called *kenosis*, that is, the emptying of One who, being God, stripped himself of his dignity in order to take on the form of a human person, who was sentenced to death. He suffered this injustice in his own flesh and offered to God the holocaust of his suffering so that all who believe in him might be saved. Mary is the author of the flesh of the Son of God who through the will of the Father offers the sacrifice that saves the world and accomplishes this through the holocaust of the cross.

My sisters and brothers, with this awareness of the saving plan of God we can say that at this time there is no historical liberation unless such liberation is incorporated into the great liberation that God has planned for all people. Any form of liberation that does not take into consideration the plan of God is a false liberation. Any liberation that is not rooted in faith in Christ's salvation is distorted, temporal, political, and economic. Even the most perfect form of liberation, if it is not united to Christ's salvation that roots out sin from the hearts of people and raises them up to God, then we can say that such liberation is not the integral salvation that God desires.

In Saint Paul's letter to the Hebrews we find that religion itself is condemned when it puts aside God's plan. Saint Paul states: *Sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings of the Temple, you neither desired nor delight in because they did not contain the fullness of Christ handing himself over for the salvation of humankind* (15). Thus we have a denunciation of the false meaning of religion. It is of no consequence to offer many prayers and penances to God if one does not have a profound understanding of the liberation that God desires ... a liberation from all forms of slavery. Such prayers and penances are meaningless if they are not placed within the perspective of Jesus' sacrifice. Christ who being rich became poor (16) and stripped himself of everything and then was humbled, even to death on the cross. (17) From the cross Jesus gives a sacrificial and salvific meaning to our Christian religion. This morning as we reflect on the fact that only in

Jesus can God's salvation be found, hopefully we will be able to see if our religion adores the true Jesus or if we have so spiritualized our image of Jesus that he is no longer the representative of God's salvation that Mary taught us as a result of her faith in and understanding of true salvation.

Through Mary we have Jesus

And so my second point: through Mary we have Jesus. The document of Puebla presents Jesus and Mary and their role in God's plan of salvation with the following beautiful words: *Through Mary, God became flesh, entered a people, and became the center of human history. She is the bond of interconnection between heaven and earth. Without Mary the gospel is stripped of flesh and blood and is distorted into an ideology, into a spiritualistic rationalism* (18). Mary, then, gives redemption the meaning that God desires.

Today's gospel places on the lips of Elizabeth a greeting that is valid for all ages. The awaited one is the fruit of Mary's womb: *Most blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb* (19). Even the pagans had some premonition about the arrival of the child of this admirable woman. For example, the Roman poet, Virgil, in one of his poems writes words that appear to echo the prophecy of Isaiah who speaks about the child of this mysterious woman: *incipe, parve puer, risum cognoscere matris:*¹ begin, gentle child, to know your mother's smile. Mary is a blessed mother who cherishes all that is human and all the needs of humankind

When Mary receives the message of the angel that she is to be the mother of the Savior, she becomes responsible for all humankind. Her *fiat, may it be done to me according to your word* (20), is not simply the words of this young woman but her words represent the voice of anguish of all people who need redemption. It can be said that in this situation of turmoil and crisis and fear that we have experienced here in El Salvador during 1979, our lips cry out with the same trembling anguish of Mary: *Here is the handmaid of the Lord! Come and save this people! Come, El Salvador needs you! History needs you! People need you!*. Mary, then, is the one who will give birth to the mysterious being whom God has promised as a sign of his omnipotence, a sign of his salvation.

Today's second reading presents us with the reality of Christ entering into history and he says to God: *A body you prepared for me and this body will be the holocaust that you need* (21). Thus we see Mary giving Jesus a body, giving Jesus human life. Like every mother who gives human life to her child, Mary is giving full human life to the one who is the Son of God but who in his human body takes on responsibility for all that is human and purifies it with his blood. Because his blood belongs to God, it is divine blood ... it is God's redemption.

My sisters and brothers, this is the great mystery that theology refers to with a somewhat strange word but one that expresses the profound union of the nature of the Word and the human nature in a *hypostatic union*. Hypostatic means person, one single person, the second person of the Blessed Trinity: the Word. The Word not only has a divine nature, the nature of God, but also has a human nature that allows him to say that his hands are the hands of God, his weeping is God weeping, his tears are God's tears and his blood is God's blood. He can speak this way because in regard to that which is human, Jesus possesses both a human and divine nature. According to theology Jesus is a person, who is sustained by a human nature and a divine nature which exists from eternity. As every human person, Jesus' human nature is assumed in Mary's womb. This personal, hypostatic union is the secret of humankind's salvation. Therefore I repeat: the salvation of the human person is impossible apart from the hypostasis of Jesus, apart from Christ, apart from faith in the Lord.

This morning we ought to pray to the Virgin for all those who work on behalf of the liberation of people ... we should pray that they do not separate themselves from this faith. We should pray that they realize that this faith gives them true greatness, leads them to their destiny, and is the beginning and the end of all that God desires to share with people so that they might be happy. May there be on earth no pretensions except those that are God's and, far from separating us from the salvific movement of Christ, may we experience the immeasurable generosity of God in saving people ... God saving people in Christ ... God who becomes man. As God saves us, he gives us the true meaning of freedom ... the freedom that Jesus lived and died for.

Mary continues to be a sign of salvation for all ages

And so finally my third point: Mary continues to be the sign of salvation for all ages. The moment of Mary's childbirth has passed and we will commemorate this event on Christmas Eve but God has desired to have Mary identified with his Church. Mary is the mother of our spiritual life and is concerned about incarnating the life of Christ in all people. Mary is not only the mother of the physical Christ but also of the historical Christ. Christ is the head of the mystical body of which we are all members and as long as one person remains to be born into this divine life, then Mary is still fruitful and the fruitful Church is still giving birth. The childbirth of Mary and the Church continue until the end of the world.

It is not a lie or a figure of speech to say that during these difficult moments of our nation we are experiencing a time of birth. It is true that in history there are times of birth for people, times in which birth is difficult. A new person has to be born, a new nation has to be born, a nation has to be born according to the heart of God. Without realizing it, we, who have faith in the destiny of history that God has placed before us ... we are all collaborating in the pains of this birth. Mary knows this destiny and for this reason we are attempting to do that which Saint Paul states: *for by one offering he made perfect forever those who are being consecrated* (22). This means that the saving act was accomplished on Calvary and at the time of the resurrection but the application of this mystery to the people of this present age is the work that the Church must accomplish in every era.

What I am doing at the present time, the ministry of these future priests, the pastoral ministry of the Church today ... all of these forms of ministry make the sacrifice of Christ fruitful in the heart of every person, that is, this ministry is directed toward converting those who are incredulous, increasing the faith of those who believe and sanctifying those who are holy. This ministry will never end.

I would like for everyone who is a member of the Church to have a clear idea of this vision of the transformation of the world that God has given to us. I would like it if we did not have to beg and seek alms from the political powers of the earth, but rather that we were so clear about all of this that we could say with total kindness, with no jealousy or envy: *what you are now doing in giving birth to a new nation is not sufficient unless it corresponds to the sanctification of all the people of El Salvador*. Yes, let us cooperate with these liberating efforts, but as Church and as a mother filled with the life of God who comes to the world, let us also bring to these efforts the promotion of the human person that is in accord with the plan of the Son of God.

What I wrote in my Fourth Pastoral Letter speaking about the Church's contribution to the country so that we would not be misinterpreted and so that all the members of the Church would know what we can and ought to offer and not offer, I said that among the things we can offer, the

most wonderful and beautiful gift of the Church's collaboration with the country is found in her gift of Mary: *Mary, mother of Christ, mother of the Church, mother of America. Puebla, too, gave a rich interpretation to the role of Mary in the Church's work of liberation and to her providential presence in the devotion of our peoples.*²

I made reference to the thoughts of the Pope who said that for Latin America devotion to Mary is a vital and historical experience that pertains to the very identity of these people³. (23) Today, motivated by the feasts of the Virgin, which during the month of December are occasions for beautiful celebrations, we remember that Mary is *a strong woman who knew poverty and suffering, flight and exile. Such situations can hardly escape the attention of those who wish to corroborate the liberating efforts of human beings and society with the spirit of the gospel*⁴. (24)

We are also mindful of the fact that, as recounted in today's gospel, Mary in her song of praise reveals herself as *a model for those who do not passively accept the adverse circumstance of personal and social life and who are not the victims of "alienation," as the expression goes today,*(25) *but who instead join with her in proclaiming that God is the "avenger of the lowly" and will, if need be, depose "the mighty from their thrones"*⁵. Marian devotion is not a sentimental or weak form of devotion. Mary teaches us God's plan and the collaboration that God requires of us.

On this Sunday which with much love we have dedicated to the Virgin, I would like all Christians who are sharing in this reflection ... I would like all of us to be able to live this powerful experience of true devotion to Mary, a devotion that does not lead to conformity or alienation, as the Pope has just reminded us⁶ (as we have just seen in the document of Puebla), but a devotion that knows how to give true meaning to suffering, exile, and oppression, a devotion that gives a redemptive meaning to our exile and therefore does not lead us to desperation or violence or hatred or vengeance, a devotion that has meaning because Jesus said: *you have given me a body to offer it to you as a holocaust* (27). Christ is the salvation of the world. This is the salvation and the plan of God that we live and that we desire to live more intensely.

Life of the Church

My dear sisters and brothers, in light of these reflections, let us review this past week and in light of this evangelical-Marian reflection let us celebrate the raising up of these young men to the ministry that draws them closer to the priesthood. In the first place, the Church that today lives through concrete events here in our Archdiocese in El Salvador ... this Church desires to be the daughter of Mary, the Church that prolongs the plan of Jesus with regard to God's salvation in history.

Monday, we celebrated a wonderful Christmas *ultreya* with the Cursillo Movement and the two groups that recently concluded their cursillo. Thanks to God, the Cursillo Movement has been promoted and has become a very committed Christian group ... a group committed to making God's salvation come alive in the world. People who have not understood this have distanced themselves from this movement, but those who have understood that developing themselves as Christians through the cursillo means that they are willing to take their place in the plan of salvation history ... these people have remained a part of this group. Thus we have this group that we can rely on and we give thanks to God for their many contributions to the Church.

Tuesday we celebrated our monthly clergy meeting with a distinct Christmas character. We made a courageous and sincere evaluation of our pastoral ministry, highlighting positive aspects as well as some negative aspects. As we concluded our wonderful fraternal gathering I invited our

beloved priests to live in their lives the twofold Christmas mystery: the mystery of immanence which focuses on the fact that God has become man and has assumed in himself the realities of our history. Therefore they should have no fear of the fluctuations of the world but must sanctify all of these movements. As a result of this the mystery of transcendence is also important because this means that God has entered history and from the perspective of his intimacy with people transcends history. Therefore the priest, the community and the Church that lives out their faith with this dual perspective of the immanence of God in history and the transcendence of history that moves toward God ... this means that these groups and individuals are fulfilling the salvific mission, Jesus' plan of salvation.

We shared in a wonderful experience in the parish of Virgen de los Remedios in the village of San Laureano and there we blessed several marriages and strengthened several young people with the sacrament of Confirmation.

The same occurred in San José in Quezaltepeque where we celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation and experienced the constancy of the Church's life, especially the commitment of the true pastor, Father Roberto, and the members of the two religious communities of women that are working with him. With joy we announced that thanks to God the schism that has disturbed the calmness and peace of Quezaltepeque is about to come to an end.

We celebrated the patronal feast of Saint Thomas and though I was unable to be there, Msgr. López went in my name.

We did the same in the village of La Esperanza in San Pedro Perulapán. There Msgr. Lopez brought the presence of the Church and represented the Archbishop and the pastors and the Vicar of that area. This community has suffered much and is being terrorized by armed leftist groups. The people of this community were first terrorized by official groups that were armed and today by armed leftist groups. The effect, however, is the same: terror and anguish in so many families. In the name of peace and justice I speak to those who are causing this terror and as I said before I repeat here: respect the peace of these homes.

This afternoon we will bless the new church of Calvario in Cojutepeque.

Bishop Rivera and Msgr. Urioste have returned from their trip of solidarity, a trip that brought them to Holland, Belgium and Germany. They found in these places much solidarity and kindness and generosity for our Archdiocese. I thank them and the communities that have so graciously offered to assist us.

The men and women who are members of the Opus Dei groups in our Archdiocese will be pleased by the letter that I received from their President-General, Bishop Alvaro del Portillo. He states: *The members and people associated with Opus Dei in El Salvador, as in every other place, work with a firm purpose and are solely motivated by their desire to serve the Church. I am well aware of the effect that they have and the fidelity with which they carry out their work because all of this leads them to affirm the indications and instructions of the bishops in all the dioceses where we work and to 'throw out of the car'. as our founder once stated, in the same direction as the diocesan bishop.* I am happy that the efforts of Opus Dei are not on the fringes of the Church nor parallel to the Church but rather are following the pastoral guidelines of our Archdiocese. We hope that their actions confirm the orientation that has been given to them by the President-General of Opus Dei.

I received a telegram from Father Genara Godoy in the Diocese of Santa Ana and he asks for our prayers on the occasion of his celebration of fifty years of priestly ordination. May the Lord fill him with many graces and great holiness.

I also want to let you know that these homilies are being gathered together and published in weekly leaflets. This is being done through the patient and intelligent work of María Julia Hernández and she has completed the compilation of last year's homilies. She was kind to give me the three volumes that contain the homilies of the Liturgical Year that we just celebrated. All those persons who wish to obtain this collection of the homilies for the Liturgical Year of 1979 can now do so.

I want to greet all radio announcers who celebrated their special day on December 20th. On the radio I listened to a conversation between two announcers and I was greatly pleased because as they spoke with one another they said: *Congratulations today but do not forget Article 17*. There I heard about Article 17 which prohibits the denigration of persons. How good it is that announcers are mindful of this reality at this time! They must continue to recognize the power of their microphones that dominate the media. The greatest sin would be to not use this power to communicate the truth and instead use the media to distort the truth and communicate lies. God desires that this conversation of the announcers be an indication of the spirit with which the media serves our nation.*

As we raise our eyes toward the universal Church you will be pleased, as I was, to know that Pope John Paul II has been singled out as the most prominent person in 1979⁷. This was the result of a survey taken among newspapers, radio and television stations. The Pope's travels to six countries, his participation in the Conference of Latin American Bishops, his visit to the United Nations, his messages to government leaders in which he spoke on behalf of those persons who are dispossessed, as well as about peace and human rights, and his one hundred hours of travel time ... all of this has led to him being called "the traveling Pope" and made him the most notable person of the year.

The Pope's Christmas will be very active. Filled with hope and faith and in the spirit of Christmas let us unite ourselves with him. If unfortunately, as threatened, they take away our Christmas, we know that no one can remove the joy and light and peace from the hearts of people who realize that Jesus is not born in the midst of the world's joy but in the midst of people who need salvation.

The bishops of Poland censured the communist system because it does not lend itself to an evaluation and because it places obstacles to evaluations and objective solution. I say this so that those who are enthusiastic about a communist regime might first look at the experience of other countries.

Events of the week

This is the environment in which the Church accomplishes salvation. Therefore from the perspective of the Church's life and in light of the Christmas message, let us look at our national situation and there on the one hand we find death and hatred and vengeance and suffering and on the other hand we see slim rays of hope. Therefore let us be like the Messiah of whom Isaiah said: *A bruised reed he shall not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench* (28). As good followers of Jesus let us strengthen this hope wherever we find it and let us also denounce the seeds of evil wherever they are found.

As we share in these reflections as Christians and as we do this at the crib in Bethlehem beneath the loving gaze of Mary who brings salvation to our history, let us enter into solidarity with the plan of God for the things of the earth. Let us not believe in this simply because someone tells us to or because the majority of people believe. Rather let us believe as Mary did ... Mary who had a profound revelation of what God desired and was persistent in following God. This is the pastoral criteria that I would like to use as we focus on these realities and it is the criteria that I would like all of my beloved sisters and brothers to use: priests, men and women religious, catechists and all the faithful. Let us work together!

I begin with an event that affected the normal work of the Archdiocese and here I refer to the occupation of the Chancery. A bulletin has been issued and I do not have anything new to say but I will read the bulletin:

On December 19th at 12:00am a group of Las Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero took over the offices of the Chancery. This occupation was then extended to the Seminary San José de la Montaña and they stated that the occupation would continue for an indefinite period of time.

Second. The occupiers revealed that the motive for this action was that they wanted the Archbishop to denounce the repressive form that had recently been used in various evictions and to ask his intervention in obtaining the freedom of individuals who had been arrested during these evictions that had been carried out by different groups of the security forces. They also asked for the return of those who had disappeared and the handing over of their bodies to their families.

Third. In light of these events we want to make the following clarifications:

(a) We consider this action both unnecessary and abusive since the Archdiocesan Church has always advocated on behalf of the just causes of the people and does this because of her preferential option for the poor. There is no need for external coercion. Afterwards it was stated that this was not an attempt to pressure the bishop but to pressure the government. However I am a personal witness to the aggressive ideological attitude of one of those who occupied the Chancery and who told me that I did not serve the people and that I had done a 180 degree turn and was now on the side of those with power. I told him that I was greatly offended by his words and I asked for proof. Here we are able to see the attitude of some people and the fact that the occupation was an act of aggression.

(b) With regard to the people who were in the building at that time, well their situation has varied. They should be considered hostages until they are released but they have been permitted to stay there voluntarily or leave. This agreement was reached through a consultation with the leadership of the Ligas because it was clear that the occupation was carried out with the intention of taking hostages. A secretary had the telephone taken out of her hand. Only when evening arrived was it clarified that no order had been given to take hostages and so people were able to leave if they so desired. We want to inform you that only two priests remained there since they saw themselves as responsible for the patrimony of the Chancery and the Seminary, a patrimony that had been entrusted to the Archbishop.

(c) On their own initiative and not because of any pressure, the Legal Aid Office of the Diocese was denouncing these evictions and the consequences that followed. They were already making arrangements for the release of those who had been arrested. The Director of the Legal Aid Office

showed those occupying the buildings the petition that had been prepared ... a petition that denounced the actions that they were demanding to be denounced.

(d) Bishop Romero, responding to humanitarian needs and in light of his usual pastoral position dialogued with the occupiers and named a special commission that is mediating a peaceful and just solution to this conflict⁸.

Thanks to God, yesterday at noon those who had been occupying the Chancery left. During the time of the occupation the Chancery continued to function in the parish offices of San José de la Montaña. However, for four days the work of the Archdiocese was disturbed unnecessarily and in a way that bordered on the ridiculous.*

Among the many expressions of solidarity that have been shown to us during these days I want to express my thanks to the Christian Democratic Party. They published their expression of solidarity and because I am not a politician I leave it to those who with political language are able to analyze these words. The political statement of the Christian Democrats reads: ... *this is really an unusual act, an act that within the framework of rational political analysis is truly inconceivable since everyone in El Salvador knows that the person who has defended human rights with more courage than anyone else in the country is Archbishop Romero. It is unnecessary to take over his See in order for him to intercede on behalf of those who have been detained since this is what he has done very often in the past and our people are well aware of this fact and support the courageous attitude of the Archbishop*⁹.*

The statement continues with political language and politically criticizes the action that I have spoken about. But I will not go there but yet I must also listen to what is said: *The unspeakable action of occupying the See of the Archbishop, a place that has been converted into the house of the people in order to denounce injustice, a symbol of the struggles of the poor and a refuge for those who are persecuted because they seek a better country ... this action, which the previous dictatorship did not dare to consider, has been undertaken by those who see themselves as being in the vanguard of the struggle for the liberation of our people*¹⁰.* May God forgive these people as I have forgiven them with all my heart! I know that they acted out of ignorance.

With regard to all of this our Legal Aid Office reports that, supported by members of Las Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero, workers from distinct work centers have recently taken over two large coffee farms and Telediario Salvadoreño.

On the plantation of Berlín the workers demand complete payment of the first fifteen days of work (according to the workers they are forced to work a third week before receiving any wages).

Secondly, on the farm El Porvenir in Opico besides asking for the correct salary they ask that they be paid their bonus which was withheld from them.

And thirdly, in Telediario Salvadoreño the workers presented a petition of twenty-two points, the most important of which referred to increased salaries and full payment of bonuses. We have been informed that here, as well as on the plantation Berlín, both sides are engaged in dialogue to resolve these conflicts.

On December 18th, the Security Forces evicted workers from various work centers among which were the three centers that have already been mentioned with the following results:.

On the plantation of Berlín, according to official reports these actions resulted in the death of two women, the arrest of twenty-five persons and five people suffered gunshot wounds. According to information that we have received, the workers at Berlín suffered other abuses and a well-armed, powerful group has arrived in this place. The cases of the twenty-five persons who were arrested have been presented to the courts and eighteen people have been released ... the other seven continue to be detained. At the same time the popular organizations denounce the disappearance of eight persons in these actions.

In Telediario Salvadoreño at least five persons were arrested. Their cases were presented to the courts yesterday and they have been released.

Thirdly, on the farm El Porvenir in Opico the result was very bloody. Officially twenty-six persons are dead but it is said that others have died but not yet been identified. People who live in this area have stated that women and children are among those who were killed. Sixteen people were arrested and five others were wounded and are currently hospitalized. Yesterday those persons who had been arrested were released. These actions took place on December 18th when more than three hundred farm workers were gathered together in a meeting. Witnesses from this area have revealed that beside the twenty-six persons who are said to have been killed, ten other bodies have been found on the land of this plantation but it has been impossible to verify this information because of the presence of the military that continues to surround this farm. Again, according to these witnesses, the bodies are being buried without any legal identification of these persons.

Our Legal Aid Office has worked on this and taken steps in the courts of justice, as well as presented these cases to the authorities of Defense and Security and the Special Investigating Commission on political prisoners and those who have disappeared and has asked for a thorough investigation of these actions. As a result of this the twenty-five individuals who had been detained have now been released. The judicial authorities have made a commitment to immediately inspect the plantation El Porvenir, exhume the bodies and hand them over to their families. With regard to this I want to let the families who are listening to their radios know that this radio station will announce the day on which the exhumation of these bodies will take place so that family members can go there. This will possibly occur on December 26th, but be attentive for the announcement.

I take advantage of this time when we are speaking about the information that our Legal Aid Office has released regarding the events of Las Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero to thank them and praise the great work that Dr. Roberto Cuéllar and his collaborators have accomplished.

In summary I am going to read the following words so that you will be able to see how people can work with great love and great effort: *From the time of its foundation in 1975 until June of this year the Legal Aid Office has been involved in 294 cases of habeas corpus, 115 cases that involved offenses in the public order when the Law of Public Order was enforced, 194 cases involving penal law, 75 cases involving labor law as applied to individuals, 35 cases involving labor law as applied to groups of workers, 82 civil cases, 45 cases involving land leases, 10 cases involving traffic violations and 15 cases involving civil matters that were later transferred to Vivienda Mínima (a housing project)¹¹. This is the work of our Legal Aid Office and no pressure has to be placed on them because they are pleased to be able to do this work.**

I also denounce here other arbitrary arrests that occurred during this past week. We have always done this and we will continue to do this whenever it is necessary. For example, Jorge Elio Portillo was arrested by the National Guard in Comasagua, Manuel Antonio Marroquín Arteaga, a

worker at Goldtree, José Rubén Abrego, Rodrigo Alvarenga and Luis Octavio Anduray, *campesinos*, all of these individuals were arrested in Chalatenango. Thus it is that the Church, as she has done in the past, will continue to carry on her defense of the human rights of all people.

This week several churches were occupied and here I say the same that I said when speaking about the occupation of the Chancery: this kind of pressure is unnecessary. If there are cases in which people are seeking refuge or attempting to defend themselves, then you know we have always attended to these situations but the guests have to be more respectful and at least ask permission and understand the conditions that will be placed upon them.*

Now, with the same pastoral energy, I want to speak about the popular groups and their armed branches who have committed a series of actions that have caused many families to mourn and clouded our nation with fear and ruins. All of this has been the result of the killings that many persons have engaged in because they considered certain individuals to have been members of ORDEN or collaborators in the previous regime. According to reports on November 1st about forty persons were assassinated by leftist groups. People living in several villages have spoken about the danger that exists as lists are published. Threats are made against many innocent people. In all of this I repeat that no one should on their own account resort to vengeance.

I also denounce the sense of anarchy that is displayed by exhibitions of military power by people who are intent on taking justice into their own hands and thus provoking popular insurrection. At the same time we repudiate those who have set fires in stores and factories and vehicles, etc. and have caused the eviction of many families and employees, leaving them without work and/or housing.

We must also speak against the roaming groups that inspire the strategies of others when they indicate, for example, that we have to prevent the government from removing the masses or that we have to break the nation's economy in order to destabilize the government. In the long run, such slogans and strategies are leading us to destruction and a fratricidal war. We can never be in accord with objectives that lead to more bloodshed. The political language of all those who want to work on behalf of our country must be the language of the common good of people.

In this regard I want to cite here the words that the Holy Father addressed to all people on the occasion of the Day of Peace: *as long as threats are permitted to remain, as long as selective support is given to certain forms of violence in line with interests or ideologies, as long as support is given to the claim that the advance of justice comes, in the final analysis, through violent struggle --- as long as these things happen, then niceties, restraint and selectivity will periodically give way in the face of the simple and brutal logic of violence, a logic which can go as far as the suicidal exaltation of violence for its own sake*¹². The Pope says that we must call things by their name and assassination must be called assassination even though ideological or political motives might appear to change its nature ... this, however, simply aggravates the situation¹³.

I also want to refer to the intervention of the Pope regarding the abductions in Rome and I repeat here his words and direct them to those persons who are the protagonists of these abductions with the hope that the grace of this Christmas season will move their hearts. Pope John Paul II spoke out on behalf of the liberation of the victims of abductions in Italy and referred to specific cases. Therefore I refer to specific cases here in El Salvador: Jamie Hill, Jamie Batlle, Adolfo McEntee and the ambassador of South Africa, Archibald Dunn. I want to speak specifically about this last case and speak directly to the members of the FPL: *I have become aware of the urgency of your demands and in the name of humanity I beg you, during this Christmas season, to be more*

rational in your demands so that they are in accord with reality. As the voice of an anguished Church I want to make the words of the wife of Mr. Dunn my own: *Christmas is the time in which the spirit of good will wells up in all people. I, as a grieving wife and mother, a human person like you, beg you that as the eyes of the world are looking at you to show that you are capable of a humanitarian action and return my husband to his home where his grandchildren, his children and I await him.*¹⁴ I intervene on behalf of these people with the hope of achieving their freedom. As I said last year, I repeat this year but now with greater anguish: *Let us celebrate a Christmas in which no one living is missing from their homes.*

Encouraged by the Pope's message and by these calls, I want to stress to all those who work on behalf of popular political struggles to attempt to illuminate your work with faith. May your efforts be motivated by God's plan so that your work might be a sign of your love and your social and political efforts might be truly constructive. With great love and earnestness I want to invite the beloved priests, men and women religious and all other pastoral ministers to courageously accept the challenge that the present situation of the country presents to us and thus engage in a true pastoral of accompaniment. I recommend that you read the editorial in this week's edition of *Orientación* where we address this pastoral line of action. Today we do not only need to accompany but we need a pastoral of accompaniment that reaches out to all organizations and all other political bodies.¹⁵

Finally, I want to address once again those who sustain the economic power of the country and who are necessarily affected by the reforms and nationalization of certain industries that are about to take place. Here I also want to express my approval and joy concerning the primary political event of the past week: the announcement of the nationalization of the exportation of coffee and sugar which will result in many benefits for the country. The experts will naturally have to develop this law but I, from the perspective of justice and love and as pastor, have the responsibility to encourage the search for the common good which is being moved forward by our government officials.

Therefore I speak to you with pastoral Christian charity because I believe there is good will in the country and good reason to believe that our country can be saved. It is for this reason that I am pained that we are once again in the midst of a return to violence and repression. These forces of repression cannot be tolerated when our people are being offered a better life. I therefore have to cry out against these abuses that bring grief to so many homes and encourage the hatred of so many groups and ultimately lead to mistrust in the very heart of our country. Why once again do we have to have recourse to military solutions rather than political solutions in resolving labor problems in industry and agriculture? Do people not want to break with the past? As we once again stain our nation with blood do we not give credence to those who say that this government is a continuation of the previous regime and thus the government loses credibility in the eyes of the people? Why have people allowed themselves to be seduced by the pressure of those who do not want to see any change take place? Fulfilling the promises that have been made and not giving in to the pressure of the extremes is the only way that an institution that has lost credibility can restore its honor. Or is it that there are still certain elements within these institutions that continue to support the games of certain interests and are behind these actions that cause the military to be discredited and put in doubt the good intentions and efforts of the government?*

In this sense then I want to address the economically powerful and in the spirit of Christmas I invite you to proclaim with Jesus the words of the gospel: there is only one God who does not tolerate idols. It is impossible to serve God and money (29) and it is for this reason that God has come into our midst to serve us. But he comes in the midst of austerity and poverty. The good of

the country demands sacrifice and has already demanded these sacrifices which in large part have been made by the majority of people who live in hunger and misery. Is it not just that others should also make the same sacrifice? Do not defend your privileges and interests with violence and the creation of armies. This cannot lead to anything that is good and it must be realized that well-being and progress cannot be established on unstable foundations. The gospel demand of social justice is difficult but it is the only solid foundation upon which peace and work can be established. Anything else means that people must accept responsibility for the explosions of violence and despair accelerating the arrival of an empire of dictatorship that no one desires.

My dear sisters and brothers, excuse me for having prolonged my words and now let us conclude in the same way as Puebla, (30) praying before the image of Mary who has been the central figure of our reflection. This is Mary's time, the time of a new Pentecost which she presides over with her prayer. This is the time when under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit the Church initiates a new step in her journey. Mary is here with us at this Christmas season and together with her we experience ourselves as children who are looking for the true happiness that Jesus brings to us.

We are now going to participate in the action of the Church that promotes these young men in their heroic desire to work on behalf of the liberation of people, but want to do this from the perspective of Jesus' salvation. These young men, together with the young men who fill our seminaries, are the hope that in El Salvador the saving power of God is incarnated also in women and men. So be it.*

¹ The 4th Eclogue of Virgil reads: *Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem*, which means: Begin, small child, to know your mother through her smile.

² *Misión de la Iglesia en medio de la crisis del país* (6 August 1979), 99.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See Homily of John Paul II in the sanctuary of Our Lady of Zapopán, Guadalajara (30 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 11 February 1979.

⁷ See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 22 December 1979.

⁸ Boletín informativo n.º 71, of the Secretariat for Social Communication of the Archdiocese of San Salvador. See *Manuscritos de los esquemas de las homilias de monseñor Oscar A Romero*, Oficina de la causa de canonización de monseñor Oscar A Romero, Arzobispado de San Salvador.

⁹ *La Prensa Gráfica*, 21 December 1979.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ See *Manuscritos de los esquemas de las homilias de monseñor Oscar A Romero*, Oficina de la causa de canonización de monseñor Oscar A Romero, Arzobispado de San Salvador.

¹² See *La verdad fuerza de la Paz*, Message for the World Day of Peace (8 December 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 23 December 1979. Here Mons. Romero is reading from the version published in *La Prensa Gráfica*, on 19 December 1979, which is slightly different from the official Spanish text. *La Prensa Gráfica* says: "la bondad, la prudencia y la selectividad saldrán perdiendo periódicamente...". The *Osservatore Romano* says: "los matices, los frenos y las selecciones cederán periódicamente...".

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Message from Mrs Daphne Dunn to the Fuerzas Populares de Liberación, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 21 December 1979.

¹⁵ See *Orientación*, 23 December 1979.

Marginal References (1) P 303; (2) Mt 1,21; (3) P 301; (4) Lk 1,44b; (5) Lk 1,44a; (6) Lk 1,45; (7) Mi 5,1b; (8) Mi 5,1a; (9) Mi 5,2^a; (10) Is 7,14; (11) Mi 5,3b; (12) Mi 5,4^a; (13) Hb 10,5.9-10; (14) Jn 1,14; (15) Hb 10,8; (16) 2Cor 8,9; (17) Ph 2,8; (18) P 301; (19) Lk 1,42; (20) Lk 1,38; (21) Hb 10,5; (22) Hb 10,10; (23) P 283; (24) P 302; (25) P 297; (26) Lk 1,52; (27) Hb 10,5; (28) Is 42,3; (29) Lk 16,13; (30) P 303.