

## THE FAMILY, GOD'S BIRTH AND EPIPHANY

**Feast of the Holy Family**  
**December 30, 1979**

*Sirach 3:3-7, 14-17*  
*Colossians 3:12-21*  
*Luke 2, 41-52*

My dear sisters and brothers, above all I want to welcome the four hundred young people who have passed the night in prayer and reflection. Without a doubt this prayer vigil has strengthened their spirit and made them pleasing to God because they have fortified the meaning of the Church.

As I look at you, my dear young women and men, I think of the central person of this morning's reflections: the young Jesus. Jesus' family had gone up to the Temple and there they lose their twelve year old child. After he is found and after the mysterious dialogue he returns with them to Nazareth to share in the humble family life which in broad strokes is described in the gospel: *the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of the Lord was upon him* (1). How beautiful to have this image of Jesus as a young man presented to us as we bring to a close this night of prayer in which young people from different parts of the Archdiocese have participated

My beloved sisters and brothers and radio audience, what a wonderful example for us during this Christmas season to continue to deepen the idea that we have attempted to study during the time of Advent and today has become the illuminating idea of Christmas: God visits humankind and remains with them. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us* (2). The mystery of the Nativity, which began on Christmas Eve and will continue until the Sunday after the feast of the Epiphany, revolves around this reflection: God enters history and reveals himself to humankind.

The mystery of imminence: God enters history and takes on all the problems of humanity. He becomes incarnated in all the people of the world and all families but he does not remain there, rather he transcends these realities. So we also have the mystery of transcendence. If God becomes man it is so that women and men become like God ... let us elevate ourselves. All human problems and political, social, and historical problems are caught up in this current of transcendence in pursuit of the Word that became flesh in order to share divine life with women and men and make them companions who share the happiness of God for eternity. Let us allow ourselves to be carried away by the current of Christ because it is in this way that we are able to celebrate the Nativity.

And one of the manifestations of God made man in this imminent and transcendent mystery, is precisely the family: he would not be truly human without a family. Nor would we be human without the memory of a mother, a father, brothers, sisters, uncles, grand parents, all that make up a family. So, when the Word became man, he began by sanctifying the family. And the Church, which takes up the mystery of God made man in its Christmas reflections, invites us today to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family.

The title of this morning's homily is: *the family: the incarnation and the epiphany of God*. We could speak these words about every family because God becomes incarnated in every family and the family has to be an epiphany, a revelation of God, alive in the world. Therefore I will develop the following three points: First, the presence of God in the family; Second, the family: the domestic Church of Christ; Third, the family, a pastoral priority of the Church in Latin America.

### **The presence of God in the family**

In today's readings we see highlighted the intimate relation between God and family, between family and God. What else is the gospel but the incarnation of God in a family and the transcendence of this family: Mary, Joseph, and the child in a transcendent movement toward God? We have already stated the place to which the family of Nazareth is traveling, that is, to the Temple, to the central national religious place in Israel. Every Passover feast was a national-religious feast for the Jews and so this good Israelite family, like all families, traveled year after year to the Temple ... just as our families who live in rural areas travel to celebrate the nation's patronal feast. How beautiful to see families coming to the Sunday celebration! Hopefully today's gospel scene is repeated in our cities and in the rural areas of our country ... the family seeking God.

The sacred character of the family is accentuated. Today we listen to a dialogue between Jesus and his parents and we are told that on a level higher than our earthly parents is our Father in heaven whose will must be obeyed by every family member. Jesus cannot be manipulated neither by his father nor by his mother when dealing with the will of the Father who is in heaven. *Son*, the Virgin says, *why have you done this do us?* (3). Jesus, with all the tenderness of a son, but also with the courage of a Son of God, says: *Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* (4). Every person has to speak this same reality. Yes, it is certain that there is a great love between spouses, a love that endures until death and is sanctified by God, but this love must always be subordinated to the love of God. The love of God is above all other things.

The other day I was told that some people criticized me because I spoke about the doctrine of the Church concerning fertility and the prohibition of certain sinful acts in marriage. They said: *why do you have to become involved in such intimate realities?* I do not become involved in intimate matters, rather it is God who becomes involved because God is the author of sex and the head of the family imposes a law which must be submitted to by spouses and their children. *Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?* (5). God is the model of paternity from whom the family derives all love and everything concerning their relationship.

Jesus is the example of the family oriented toward God. Jesus is the example of obedience to God. There in obedience to God people discover their vocation and in this Mass in which so many young people are participating, I want to let these young men and women know that this is the most important question of your lives: what does God desire of you? Above all other economic and family considerations it is important to be able to discern this question: what does God desire of you? How many times have I heard people say: *I want to be a priest but I am very poor*. That is not important; seek the Kingdom of God and his justice! (6) Follow your vocation and everything else will be given to you. Are not the majority of those who are priests poor? Have we not heard our mothers lament that they would have liked to have been able to please us, but they also are poor? And yet here there are so many priests who found themselves in that difficult situation, but thanks to God, they followed God's will and God gave them the means to do this. Yes, God desires certain things and many times he submits our faculties to the test.

When the holy family returned to their home in Nazareth, the place where the newly elected Pope Paul VI visited ... in the house in Nazareth (where today a beautiful church has been built) the Pope said: *Who could live here in the company of the family of Nazareth and not learn about the simplicity of life, silence, work and prayer?*<sup>1</sup> My dear sisters and brothers, young women and men, could people live in our homes, no matter how humble they might be, and find there the virtues that are found in the house at Nazareth?

Today's first reading offers us these routine family obligations and we see that they have been converted into a worship of God. We should spend time in reflection on the first reading from the book of Sirach where we see our duty with regard to our parents is closely united to the blessings of God.

The reading begins by telling us that everything proceeds from God's initiative. God places a father in honor over his children and affirms the authority of a mother over her children. (7) Today there is much talk about a generation gap and therefore children will say to their parents: *You do not understand today's young people ...* as though these children were wiser than their parents. Therefore, remember this principle: God makes parents more honorable than their children. You are not superior to your father or mother because you are a university student and your father is a *campesino* or because you are a professional and your mother is a humble worker in the market. God has given them an authority that you do not have. All authority comes from God and when used according to God's plan such authority must be respected. Furthermore, the fact that your parents have received this gift from the Lord is another reason why they should be respected.

*Those who honor their father atone for their sins:*(8) this is an obligation of the family that has a religious transcendence. To forgive sins is a matter of religion and thus honoring one's father becomes a matter of religion when such honor is changed into atonement for sin. Therefore, children are most happy who respect their parents because even though they know their own defects and sins, they also know that loving their father and mother is the way that they are purified from their sins. If they truly love their parents then they will avoid everything that might cause them to be shamed.

It is said: *he who honors his father is gladdened by children and when he prays he is heard* (9). Another religious characteristic and another obligation: honoring mother and father is the same as having an audience with God. God will listen to you if you are respectful toward your parents. *The Lord listens to those who respect their mother and father.* (10)

We see this thought repeated in the reading: *The kindness to a father will not be forgotten; it will serve as a reparation for your sins.*(11). Help given to a father is charity which God receives. If to the poor Jesus said: *whatever you did for one of these least brothers or sisters of mine, you did for me* (12), how much more will these words be applied to our relationship with our parents. God will receive everything that we do to our parents as an offering for our sins.

*On your own day of ordeal God will remember you.* (13) The Biblical phrase, *the day of the Lord*, (14) refers to the day of our judgment. It is the day when we must be accountable to God. Our accounting will go well if we have had good relations with our parents.

At this time in our reflection I want to remind you of the beautiful words that Pope John Paul II spoke in Mexico. When referring to the family and its relationship to God he spoke these beautiful words: *There is a profound and beautiful saying that our God, in his innermost mystery, is not loneliness but a family, since God embodies paternity, filiation, and the essence of the family that is*

*love. In the divine family that love is the Holy Spirit.*<sup>2</sup> The theme of the family is not unrelated to the theme of the Holy Spirit. Rather we know that God is family and in God there is Father and Son who are united in a relation of love that produces the third person, the Holy Spirit who, like an anointing, becomes the bond that unites these family relationships. Therefore, on earth when God said: *Let us make man in our image, after our likeness* (15), God created woman and man so that encouraging and supporting one another in marriage the fruitfulness of the family would come about, a fruitfulness anointed with love and the Spirit of God.

Blessed are those homes where this relationship with God is not forgotten and where the family is united as a true religious community that prays, gives thanks, and is made holy by honoring the Lord. The more a family is mindful of this relationship with God, the more God will be made known on earth. If God in heaven is family so too is God on earth also family. It is for this reason that we have entitled today's homily: the family, the revelation of God.

### **The family, the domestic Church of Christ**

Our second thought leads us back to the Christian concept: the family, the domestic Church. These words are not mine but the words of the Second Vatican Council which states: *The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children; they should encourage them in the vocation which is proper to each of them, fostering with special care vocation to a sacred state* (16). In Mexico the Pope stated: *making every Christian family into an authentic "domestic Church," with all the rich implications of that term, is the greatest need in Latin America.*<sup>3</sup>

Today's second reading inspires me with this thought because Saint Paul writes to the community of the Colossians so that they might avoid possible errors with regard to Christ. In this letter he presents a wonderful Christology in which Christ is not seen as someone who is distant but One who has become incarnated and is the head of all those who want to be members of him and who through Baptism are incorporated into him. Through Baptism Christians are incorporated into Christ in such a way that the life of Christ moves within them and influences their whole life. This is referred to as the Church, the body of Christ; the Church, the family of God; the Church, the People of God; the Church vivified by the Spirit of God. This concept of the People of God, rich in all its consequences, is that which, in the Christian era, elevates the family because a Christian family is one in which father, mother, and children belong to another greater family which is the Church. The Church relies on the family. The more domestic Churches there are in our Diocese, true communities of faith, charity, love, hope, and prayer, then the more will our Church be enriched. Also the more our Archdiocese becomes Church, then the more our Church is family. Intermediate groups are those communities that are called parishes, base communities of faith, youth groups, all those groups that in the spirit of Church come together to reflect on the Bible, to be nourished by the sacraments, to be in communion with the bishop ... all of this is indispensable in the Church family. As these different groups grow we become more Church and young people and parents are able to bring to their homes a sense of Church.

Thus with the arrival of Christianity the mystery of the Church is introduced into the family. Therefore the spouses of a marriage that is blessed in the Christian Church have a broader vision, one that encompasses much more than the simple love of man and woman. When it is said that Christian marriage is an image of Christ's love for the Church and that the husband becomes Christ and the bride the Church, we then come to understand the inseparable love of Christ for the Church, a love that throughout history will overcome difficulties, temptations and violence, a love that will

unite them close together, making them fruitful in holiness and always the Church of Christ. Despite the temptations and difficulties and all those realities that attempt to break the wonderful unity of the Church, this same love of Christ for his Church must also be reflected in the joy of marriage.

In the reading that was just proclaimed, Saint Paul lists the ecclesial elements of the family and concludes by speaking about the obligations of the family. He is telling us that the family is submerged in the sea of the Church but also the family must be a small Church, a domestic Church that is related to the larger Church. What are the elements that are presented to us in Saint Paul's letter?

Saint Paul speaks to the Christians of Colossae: *God's chosen ones, holy and beloved* (17). Do we not hear in these words, my brothers and sisters, an echo of the Old Testament where God calls Israel his chosen people? This is the Church of the New Testament and for this reason Saint Paul speaks about the Church as *the new Israel, the Israel of God*.(18) Just as in the Old Testament God formed Israel into his family and just as God is portrayed as the faithful spouse despite the infidelity of his spouse (the people), so too in the New Testament we see that the Church is referred to as a holy and beloved people, a people consecrated to and loved by God, a people chosen by God. Therefore, my beloved sisters and brothers, I repeat what I said before, namely, that during this time of political turmoil and confusion, let us not confuse the concept of people in general with the concept of the People of God. This confusion is the cause of many errors, even in Christian communities. The Christian community is that which is spoken about by Saint Paul: chosen, holy, beloved by God. Therefore from this perspective the chosen community has to sanctify, enlighten, guide, and accompany the people in general and not lose their own identity among the people in general but rather they must be a leaven that does not lose its strength to be leaven.

Thus, my dear young women and men, if you are members of popular political organizations, wonderful! But also be Christians. Do not forget that as you relate to other people, with members of popular organizations, you have a special commitment. Besides being a member of the people of El Salvador, you are also a member of the chosen People of God, a holy people, a people consecrated to God, a people loved by God. Do not lose this love by becoming involved in foolishness that perhaps is imposed on you by other ideologies! Know how to be leaven in your organizations! Know how to make a political commitment without betraying the love that God has for you as members of the People of God! Wherever you go, know how to be family! Just as you are not embarrassed by your families wherever you go, so, too, do not be embarrassed before those who boast of their little faith ... do not be embarrassed to let them know that you are Christian!

On this feast of the Holy Family it is very important to understand what the community, the family of God, ought to be. In a community, in the family of God, all brothers and sisters come together. It is like a family whose members work in different places during the week and then come together on the weekend, come together around the table, in their home, come together with their parents and there, as they recall their childhood, all divisions disappear ... there are no factions ... there is family where one is filled with family love and pride. No one can take these attitudes and make a political commitment without betraying the love of the family.

Every Christian community has to be this: a place where people with different political options can come together. Government officials, soldiers, members of El Bloque Popular Revolucionario, members of FAPU and Las Ligas, allow yourselves to be nourished in your Christian faith and stand before the common Father, the common family and swear before God not to betray these convictions of family and faith, swear not to betray your commitment to Christ. The members of

the Christian community must incarnate themselves in the reality of the people otherwise they would not be good Christians. They must live the reality of their country but must know how to do this from the perspective of their faith. Then from this faith perspective, from their membership in this holy family, loved by God, chosen by God, they must mingle with all those who are not chosen or holy or loved by God, with those who might even be enemies of God, and perhaps even with atheists, but they must not lose their faith. You are not an atheist; you are not a criminal; you should not allow yourself to become involved in violence that goes against your conscience. My sisters and brothers, I believe that herein lays the conflict of our nation, namely, all the people of El Salvador have been baptized and belong to this holy people, but in the practical order, they have forgotten this reality. It is for this reason that the base communities of faith are attempting at this time to awaken people and make them aware of their baptismal commitment and thus enable them to be able to experience a holy pride in belonging to this *chosen people of God, this holy and beloved people.*(19)

From all of this Saint Paul derives the obligations of this people and all members of this people when he says: *As the uniform of the people of God put on kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another. As the Lord has forgiven, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body* (20). It is a great privilege for Christians to clothe themselves with this uniform of virtues and to be called together to be one in heart with the heart of Christ. Therefore many strategies that the Christian will be invited to engage in here on earth are not in accord with the authentic meaning of being a Christian. Therefore, honour your family, the people of God.

In this way our Church family and our human family become a spiritual offering to the Lord. Saint Paul says: *Be thankful. Let the word of God dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him* (21). What a beautiful description of you, laymen and women who are in the world: priests of baptism.

Through Baptism, all of you, the family of God, have to celebrate your Mass in the world. You celebrate Mass and here Saint Paul describes the Mass of the laity: *Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus* (22). Look at what the laity do! It is wonderful! When I look at the multitude here in the Cathedral and think of the many communities that are reflecting together this morning, I see how many different ways there are to earn a living. Some of you are professionals who work at a desk as lawyers, some work in medical offices and some of you at home developing engineering projects, some of you are factory workers. You have so much ability! Some of you work in the market and others provide services for families in their homes and still others care for children. Some are workers in the rural areas and plant corn and plough the fields. All of this is the Mass of the laity. Therefore, when the priest, the servant of the priestly people, gathers together all this work at the time of the Eucharist, he is doing something that is proper to his office, something that only he can do ... he gives a meaning to the work that each one of you is doing. *Accept this bread, fruit of the earth and work of human hands.*<sup>4</sup> I do not celebrate Sunday Mass alone nor do I celebrate Mass only with those who are concelebrating, like today with Father Rafael Urrutia. The Mass that I celebrate and that every priest celebrates, here or in whatever parish, is the Mass of all of you who participate in this Mass in order to offer to God the work of the week, to offer to God your concerns and anxieties. Therefore the priest has a great responsibility to make holy at this moment the true Mass of the laity, the true worship of the People of God.

All that I am saying here is summed up in the document of Puebla when they speak about the family: *the couple sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony is a witness to the paschal presence of the Lord* (23). In other words, here we are not simply speaking about marriage as recounted in the Old Testament, but as the marriage of those persons who have been baptized and who bear the mark of the Passover, the death and resurrection of Christ. Wherever there is a Christian marriage there is also a testament of the paschal presence of the Lord.

*The Christian family cultivates a spirit of love and service.* (24) The Christian family of love and service is what makes true Christian families happy.

*Four fundamental relations of the person find their full development in family life: parenthood, filiation, brotherhood, and nuptial life* (25). In other words, the relations between parents and children, parenthood; the relation of sons or daughters to their mothers and fathers, filiation; relationship between those children born of the same parents, brotherhood and sisterhood; the relation between spouses, the primary members of the family, a nuptial relationship. What a beautiful summary!

*These same relationships make up the life of the Church: the experience of God as Father, the experience of Christ as our brother, our experience as children in, with, and through the Son, and the experience of Christ as the spouse of the Church* (26). It is interesting that in the community of the Church Christ is highlighted above all else. Christ is the principal person in our meetings and gathered around him we experience ourselves as brothers and sisters and through him we enter into a relationship of children with the Father. The experience of Christ as the spouse of the Church and the relationship between husband and wife in the home is reflected in the Church because Christ and the Church are made up of all the faithful people. *Family life reproduces these four basic experiences and shares them in miniature. They are the four aspects of human love.* This synthesis could serve as a single homily. The four faces of human love which are lived in a wonderful way in the Church united with God and with Christ are also lived in a lesser way in our homes with our parents and brothers and sisters and with all those .... for St Paul continues, after today's reading, and speaks about the relations with servants and slaves and workers for the good of the family. (27)

There is so much to say here! How good it would be to return to the Word of God at this time when social sensitivity is not so precise in its concept and reflect on the words spoken to workers who make their livelihood by serving others: *serve your masters, but serve them as the Lord desires, serve them as though you were serving God.* Paul then speaks to masters and says: *treat your workers justly and fairly, realizing that you too have a Master in heaven.* Ah! If employers and employees, rich and poor were only mindful of this relationship with God, the Father of all people and realized that they would have to give an accounting to the Lord, we would not have this conflict between classes in our country ... first class persons and second class persons\* ... In summary what we desire is families with a spirit of Church, and a Church with a spirit of family..

After speaking about the ecclesial base communities, Puebla states: *Many parishes and dioceses are also emphasizing family life.* I would like us to take these words very seriously and work together. I am happy to be here this morning celebrating with young people who have come from different communities and who want to make this spirit of family a profound element in their communities and parishes. Do not forget that the ecclesial base community is not an island or a club but must be open to the parish and the parish must be open to the diocese and the diocese open to the Universal Church. Indeed, the Universal Church gathered together as one family on this feast of the Holy Family is most evocative of this reality.

Again I repeat the words of Puebla: *Many parishes and diocese are also emphasizing family life. They know that Latin Americans --- we the people of El Salvador --- need and are looking for a family* (28). This is most certain and is one of our great cultural treasures. Let us not lose this treasure. Everyone in El Salvador has the need to look for a family and many times they will make a mistake and form bad families. How wonderful it would be if we would leave this celebration of the feast of the Holy Family giving thanks to God for the sense of family that the people of El Salvador possess and at the same time asking God for the wisdom to be able to use this sense of family in such a way that we build families as God desires.

Puebla states: *We say this because in this search for family the Church which is family can respond to people's need. It is not a matter of psychological tactics, but rather of fidelity to the Church's own identity. For the Church is not a place where human beings merely "feel" that they are the Family of God but is the place where they "become" that --- truly, deeply and ontologically* (29). We do not come together to "feel" that we are family, but rather come together to "become" family. Those who through the power of the Spirit and Baptism participate in the life of God become children of the Father in Jesus Christ. This grace of divine filiation is a great treasure that the Church ought to offer to women and men of our Continent. Therefore, my sisters and brothers, I continually insist that we become authentic Church and not distort the objectives of the community. The Church and the Christian community become children of God and as children of God work together as brothers and sisters with all people for the common good of that other family which is the nation.\*

### **The family, a pastoral priority in Latin America**

I wish to end by referring to John Paul II who has a rich concept of the family in Latin America. My third point is: the family, a pastoral priority in Latin America.

The Pope made many recommendations to us in his discourse that was directed to the bishops. There among the pastoral priorities that he placed before us, the bishops of Latin America, was the family in the first position. Then secondly, he recommended that we place a priority on priestly and religious vocations and, thirdly, youth<sup>5</sup>. This morning we are obeying the Pope in a wonderful way because here we are gathered together with young women and men and at the same time we are also gathered as a family.

Speaking to the bishops he said: *The family: Make every effort to ensure that there is pastoral care for the family. Attend to this area of such priority, importance, certain that evangelization in the future depends on the "domestic church."* *The family is the school of love, of knowledge of God and of respect for life and human dignity*<sup>6</sup>. I repeat here the four phrases that the Pope used to define the family. The Pope said that the family is *a school of love, a school of knowledge of God, a school of respect for life and a school of respect for human dignity. The family and this pastoral work is all the more important because the family is the object of so many threats.*<sup>7</sup> This concept was made more explicit when the Pope stated: *In defense of the family against these great evils, the Church pledges its help because many families cannot live a normal existence because the more negative aspects of development have a particularly heavy impact on them --- truly depressing indications of unhealthiness.* On this day when we reflect on the family we are mindful of so many children who are ill, so many fathers and mothers who are malnourished: *poverty and even misery, ignorance and illiteracy, inhuman housing conditions, chronic malnutrition, and countless other realities that are just as sad*<sup>8</sup> See how the problems of the family are bound up with the great problem we have continually spoken about: social justice? Wherever there are families that are in



the situation described by the Pope we can say that this is the result of social injustice.\* Because we do not want to have a situation where some families are well-nourished and others malnourished, we are supporting and advocating reforms that will eliminate social injustice.\*

*In defense of the family against these evils, the Church pledges its help and it invites governments to adopt, as a key point of their action, a socio-family policy that is intelligent, bold, and persevering --- recognizing that herein undoubtedly lies the future, the hope, of the continent<sup>9</sup>.*

The Pope became most eloquent when he said that there in Puebla he wanted to address all the families of the continent and then described how he felt entering so many homes and houses where families live more modestly: *Homes where food and well-being are not lacking, but harmony and joy perhaps are; homes where families live rather modestly, uncertain of the morrow, helping one another to live a difficult but dignified existence.* What a beautiful phrase when speaking about poor families: *helping one another to live a difficult but dignified existence.\**

We continue to refer to the Pope's words: *poor habitations on the outskirts of your cities where there is much hidden suffering, though the simple joy of the poor dwells there; humble shanties of peasants, indigenous peoples, immigrants, etc. To each family the Pope would like to say a particular word of encouragement and hope. You families that can enjoy well-being, do not close yourselves off in your own felicity; open to others, sharing your surplus that others lack<sup>10</sup>.*

Then the Pope speaks some very wise words: *Families oppressed by poverty, do not lose heart; without making luxury your ideal or wealth the basis of your happiness, join with all in seeking to take difficult steps and to hope for better days. Families visited by the anxieties of physical or moral suffering, or tested by illness or misery, do not add bitterness or despair to those sufferings; be wise enough to alleviate your sufferings with hope<sup>11</sup>.*

## **Life of the Church**

We have seen how the Church, the family and God are joined together. Since this time in our homily and reflection is a time for us as family, I want to remind you of those things which we have done as a holy people, a people consecrated to God ... I want to remind you of our ecclesial activity.

Last Sunday I blessed the church of Calvario in Cojutepeque. It is a beautiful sanctuary that was constructed in honor of the Merciful Lord, a very ancient and venerated image of that city. This work was done with the help of Mercedes Barriere, may she rest in peace.

The parish of Del Carmen celebrated Christmas with a wonderful First Communion ceremony, a ceremony in which mainly poor children participated. The same occurred in Huizúcar where we celebrated First Communion and Confirmation.

We have the pleasure of greeting the Provincial of the Augustinians who minister in the parish in Miramonte and Miralvalle. We are pleased with the joy that he experiences as a result of having priests from this Congregation in this area which he sees as very lively and greatly blessed by God.

In Quezaltepeque, the former priest, Quinteros, did not fulfill his promise to leave the parish on December 26<sup>th</sup>. All peaceful means have been exhausted in trying to resolve this situation with him.

The cooperative for priests celebrated the feast of Christmas during the past week.

In the beautiful villages of Volcán, Quezaltepeque, Volcan San Juan, Los Planes, we are able to see an example of the work of Christians in base communities of faith. Two novices, Carlos and Rose, decided to go there to help establish base communities. They have ministered there for many months and the community is flourishing. I had the privilege of celebrating First Communion there and today I am pleased to be able to speak about this example of what can be done by lay apostles.

Our Diocese has a beautiful tradition of celebrating the feast of the Holy Innocents in Antiguo Cuscatlán and this was carried out with much splendor.

We also celebrated the sacrament of Confirmation in Cuscatlán.

In San Antonio, Los Ranchos, the traditional festival of corn was celebrated. For the third time I was unable to go there but I am sure that you will forgive me and understand my reasons. You were also most generous in sending me a beautiful *sombrero* made from corn husks and adorned with corn silk. At first sight it would appear to be a *sombrero* made of reed. It is amazing to see how people have been able to make use of all the different materials that come from the production of corn: husks, corn silk and corn itself. All of this is an art that should not be lost. I therefore congratulate the inhabitants of San Antonio los Ranchos for the efforts that you continue to make in order to overcome poverty and present a desire to create a better life for your community.\*

Together with this gift I received a beautiful letter from the community of Potónico in which I find an example that should be imitated in other communities. The people of this area have been able to separate the religious aspects of the celebration of their patronal feast from the secular aspects.\* This occurred during their celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception: *We did all that was possible to have a solemn celebration and we were happy to be able to offer people a truly religious celebration that was separated from the profanations that previously surrounded this feast.\** People have sent letters of gratitude to YSAX for their programming and I also want to thank them for the transmission of my homilies throughout the week. These homilies are transmitted in part at 6:30am, 11:00am and 5:00pm.

I received a very encouraging letter from the community of Santa Tecla and am very pleased with their thinking. They have defined the meaning of a Christian community and stated: *In this context we see you, Bishop, and here in our community we are required to coordinate all the creative efforts of our commitment to proclaim and actualize liberation and Christian fraternity.* This is a wonderful way of organizing pastoral ministry that must always be done in a Christian setting without forgetting the commitment that people have with the realities of this earth.

I have received letters from several communities that denounce abuses of popular organizations which have demanded people to join their ranks and also threatened people. I repeat once again that people must respect the freedom of others and therefore should not oblige people to opt in a way that they do not desire.

I have also received complaints from people who have said that there are individuals who are publishing lists of "subversives" and then later these persons who have been singled out are accused of burning sugarcane fields, assaults, robberies and assassinations. The people whose names appear on these lists find themselves in a situation where their lives are in danger. The people who wrote me this letter say they know who are responsible for compiling these lists and they beg these

individuals to not place in danger individuals who are innocent and can die as a result of this foolishness.\* This is not simply foolishness but very evil tendencies.

I am saddened by the havoc that resulted from the explosion of a bomb that had been placed in the UCA, the Central American University. Parts of the Administration building were damaged as well as some computers. Hopefully the damage is not very serious. But what we see here is that brute force is used unnecessarily\*. Reason should be combated with reason!\*

In Planes de Renderos, the Holy Spirit has been doing wonderful things this week in the house of the Assumption Sisters. There a group of Catechumens are continuing the process of coming to a greater understanding of the meaning of their lives as Christians. In the house of the Salesians, people have come together for three days to participate in a Renewal in the Spirit. Our dear friend, Bishop Malavera who has come here from Mexico, has been directing this encounter. Today we will celebrate the closing of this event at 5:30pm in the National Gymnasium. There we will have a wonderful celebration of the Eucharist and many people are expected to participate in this Mass. I invite those who can participate to come there and we will offer together prayers to the Holy Spirit on behalf of our country.

The Marriage Encounter will celebrate their special day, the Feast of the Holy Family, by coming together in the church of Del Carmen to celebrate Mass this evening at 8:00pm

Regarding the youth encounter that occurred in El Seminario San José de la Montaña, I do not think that I have to tell you that these young people have been in the forefront of my mind throughout this reflection.

I invite you to come together here in the Cathedral tomorrow at 7:00pm (we will anticipate the beginning of the New Year) as we celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving, the last Mass of the year, as we greet the New Year. Tomorrow, in the Cathedral at 7:00pm. Those who want to come together a little later will have an opportunity to do so at the Hospital Divina Providencia where we will celebrate Mass at 8:00pm. As usual, we will celebrate a Holy Hour on the first day of the month in El Hospital Divina Providencia. Therefore, at 5:00pm we will celebrate this Holy Hour and pray together for peace in our country.

Moving now from this local church we raise our eyes to the horizons of the world. In his discourse at the close of the year the Pope gives us a panorama of the world. In the first place, the Pope stated that Church has an obligation to defend the inalienable rights of the individual and the community and all people. The Pope stated: *Our mission is not interference in the internal matters of the State but rather is our gospel obligation*<sup>12</sup>. When speaking about the family, the Pope, in all his contacts with political officials in the Vatican as well as during his travels, has insisted on the importance of providing concrete support to the family and alluded to the next Synod which will be dedicated to the theme of the family.<sup>13</sup>

Again looking at the situation of the world the Pope spoke about the North American hostages in the Embassy in Iran and classified that action as a violation of the unquestionable principles of International Law. The Pope also spoke out against the exorbitant price of oil which has caused great suffering to humble people throughout the world. *The Church considers it her obligation to raise her voice in defense of human rights.*<sup>14</sup>\* These words were spoken by the Pope concerning the exorbitant price of oil that has caused a rise in the price of the most elemental necessities of daily life and has also caused families and society in general to experience serious afflictions<sup>15</sup>.

Referring to the Middle East the Pope spoke about the disturbing points of conflict, the dark and horrible terrorist actions occurring in Italy and other parts of the world and begged terrorists groups to put an end to their violence. He also asked for international solidarity on behalf of the unfortunate caravans of refugees<sup>16</sup>. Speaking about refugees, the Pope read a moving letter from someone who had first hand experience of this spectacle and said: *Before us was a camp of two hundred thirty-five thousand persons, crowded on top of one another, human wrecks, half-starved, emaciated, at the limits of survival. I will not describe to you the scenes of the wounded, the mutilated, children, with horrible sores, whose eyes cannot even weep any more*<sup>17</sup>. This person asked the Pope to pray for refugees. After reading the letter in Saint Peter's Square the Pope said: *This is our response and they are waiting for the response of the people.*

As you know, in February the Pope will travel to the Philippines and there beatify a saint from that country. During Christmas the Pope spoke about the rights and the dignity of children: *Respect for the child should begin before birth, from the very first moment of conception.*<sup>18</sup> He then added that *today our hearts are thinking about him, the new born child at Bethlehem and at the same time they are concentrated upon every baby, upon every human child, upon every new human being, born of human parents. Upon the baby already born --- upon the tiny infant ... But in this respect we must ask ourselves whether there will continue to accumulate over the heads of this new generation of children the threat of common extermination*<sup>19</sup>. The Pope condemned the insane arms race that is taking place in so many countries throughout the world.\*

The Pope has given us the theme for the first of the year. I want us to celebrate the first of January in the way that the previous Pope, Paul VI, exhorted us, that is, as a day of peace. As Pope Paul VI gave a theme to the celebration of this yearly day of prayer for peace, so this year, 1980, we have been given the theme *Truth, the power of peace.*

### **Events of the week**

As a commentary on this great idea that we cannot have the power of peace without truth that sustains peace, I want to present to you this panorama in which, from the perspective of our Church, we look at our country. As God's chosen people, the Church we look at the general population of El Salvador. In light of the Pope's principle: truth, the power of peace, we analyze those situations where we find the weaknesses of our peace? In the lies and the hypocrisy and the falsehoods\* And there we find events that are sinful acts, lies because sin is always a lie and there also, thanks to God, we find events that signify the truth. Everything that is built in truth is built in peace.\* Thanks to God, we find this week positive actions: paths of peace.

First, a law has been passed that deals with the abuse of the freedom of expression<sup>20</sup>. It was time to unmask so many anonymous and phantom associations that in the darkness of their anonymity abused individuals and institutions and fomented hatred.\* We said in a previous homily that there was a need to break with the past and here we see a very dangerous thread that is now being dealt with. Let the media inform us about those persons responsible for so many slanders.\* Today the new law states that newspapers, radio and television stations cannot publish anything unless there are signatures that identify the author of such paid propaganda ... there are no exceptions made here and those who violate this law will be held responsible.\*

We consider very positive the decree that freezes rents<sup>21</sup> as well as the proclamation of a law that deals with the abuses of usury\*. The other day we denounced the fact that because of a debt of 300.00 colones a family had their house seized and still they are paying the debt. The Minister of

Justice has committed himself to fight against every form of moral corruption. Here, as always, we say the same: we hope that these words are corroborated by actions.\*

Perhaps we might consider as both positive and negative the release of those who were arrested as a result of the evictions that took place and the exhumation of the bodies and the return of the bodies that were identified. I say this has some negative elements because all of this could have been avoided and there should have been no need to have recourse to these measures. Here I want to share with you the eye-witness testimony of our Legal Aid group: *On December 29<sup>th</sup> the exhumation of the bodies buried in Joya de Cerén as a result of the tragic and painful events that occurred last week in El Porvenir, Opico was verified. Those present for this formality were the director of Legal Aid, government authorities and other assistants. A total of twenty-six bodies were exhumed some of which were the remains of women. Many families gathered together at this place to identify their loved ones and the scene was very macabre. Some foreign reporters said: "Look at the beauty of the landscape of El Salvador, but look at what it is used for!" The mother of one of the campesinos who had been killed said as she wept: "My son seeking daily bread found death!" The heads of the majority of the bodies had been crushed and several were found with their pockets turned inside out, a sign that they had been searched before being buried. Las Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero denounced the fact that these people had been robbed of their money before they were buried. A campaign has been launched to obtain reparations for their families.\**

The report of our Legal Aid group continues: *On December 24<sup>th</sup> the burial of the workers Raúl Humberto Martínez and Manuel Antonio Marroquín took place ... Raúl a worker at Conelca and Manuel at Goltree Liebes. Raul was abducted from his house and Manuel from the place where he worked and their bodies were found on December 23<sup>rd</sup> on the street that leads to the village Las Granadillas, toward Puerto de la Libertad. Their bodies had clear signs of physical torture: broken ribs, burns, parts of their bodies torn apart. The previous week two union leaders from Santa Ana, Gerardo Antonio Hererazo and Salvador Sánchez Hidalgo, were brutally assassinated. Also one of the union leaders at Tropical Embotelladora was arrested and then released on December 24<sup>th</sup>. This new persecution of workers, focused on the torture and death of their leaders, is against the most fundamental rights of the workers of El Salvador, that is, against their right to life, liberty, and free association in unions.*

I received a telegram from the UDN Party which states: *The UDN condemns and protests the assassination of Manuel Carranza Chávez, 56 years old, the uncle of Mario Aguiñada Carranza, Secretary-General of UDN. He was violently abducted from his house in Ayutuxtepeque on Saturday, December 22<sup>nd</sup> at 10:00pm, assassinated and brought to Coatepeque where his body was found on Sunday morning. The UDN considers this action as one more expression of the offensive reaction that is taking place\* and as a direct act of aggression against our party and against our companion, Mario Aguiñada.*

Legal Aid has also provided us with the following information: *We do not know if the campesinos José Rubén Abrego, Rodrigo Alvarenga and Octavio Andura, arrested in Chalatenango on December 20<sup>th</sup> ... we do not know if they have been released. We also know nothing with regard to Jorge Elio Portill who was arrested on December 17<sup>th</sup>. This week, on December 28<sup>th</sup>, Gloria Martínez, a resident in Tugurios, was arrested after several poor families had been evicted from their land which they had occupied and which is located on the outskirts of Liceo Salvadoreño. They had occupied this land because they had no place else to live. The housing problem is very acute and a human and Christian solution must be found.\**

With regard to the situation in the slums, despite all the misery, I want to congratulate the Minister of Health for the effective, rapid and human way in which he is dealing with the health and hygiene situation in this marginalized area. This is the way in which the complex issue of housing and people who live in slums should be dealt with.\*

In light of all of this we are in agreement with the note of Dr. Roberto Lara Velado. In my eyes he appears to be very clear and courageous as he addresses the government and says: *There is no doubt that the difficult climate of our country has been exasperated in recent days. Events have occurred that have greatly disturbed many citizens. The public Security Forces and perhaps some members of the military have occasioned the death of a great number of citizens and this leads people to believe that the repression of a previous time has returned. It is true that it can be said that these actions were provoked but the response to such situations should be limited and in some way proportional ... As a citizen I feel obliged to make my point of view known to honorable government officials. Besides, when I accepted the invitation to be a member of the Special Investigating Commission that would examine the cases of political prisoners and those who had disappeared, I made public the conditions under which I accepted said invitation, namely, the cessation of every form of repression. All of this obliges me to send you this letter. I believe that it can be said that no one is in agreement with this disorder. When the Security Forces attempt to establish order and limit themselves to the use of means employed in all other civilized countries, for example, tear gas and other similar actions, they deserve the respect of all citizens. I believe that these crimes should be punished and for this there are legal procedures and established punishments. The majority of the acts committed are not punishable with the death penalty and this could be criticized because individuals have exceeded the use of acceptable means and employed means that have caused death. Therefore I believe that it is imperative that you continue your investigation and make known to the citizens of El Salvador the truth concerning these actions and that you then punish those, whoever they may be, who are responsible for these crimes.\**

These actions are once against causing the nation of El Salvador to be held in less esteem. This could not be understood in any other way since the United States Embassy is decreasing its personnel.<sup>22</sup> There is a fear that the future of El Salvador is not very clear.

This week the Armed Forces have issued a statement in which they state that they are not leaning toward the right. The Minister of Defense states: *We emphatically deny that the Armed Forces are becoming an instrument of the right or of the oligarchy. On the contrary, we are certain that we are making sincere effort to interpret the general will of the people and we are not placing ourselves at the service of any extreme minority.*<sup>23</sup> I want to appeal to this declaration, not to the language of the words but to the language of the acts: I am not asking for words or good intentions but I do ask for an investigation of the events that we have just spoken about ... events where there was much bloodshed, arrests and disappearances.\*

On the other hand, the demonstration that was carried out on December 27<sup>th</sup> with displays of propaganda and strength, thus provoking those who want to resurrect ORDEN,<sup>24</sup> was, according to their statement, a demonstration in support of the Armed Forces.<sup>25</sup> I ask: in support of what? In support of the sad events that once again stained the country with blood? In support of what? In support of the fact that they continue to defend their own economic interests or in support of the fact that they want the structural changes that have been announced to favor the people? This last reality highlights the support that all the people of El Salvador have to give because we are seeking the true good of the country. It is easy to fall into the temptation, into the trap of those blaring sirens and believe that all is well. But now more than ever before, when it is obvious that there is a crisis within the government, the Armed Forces must take responsibility for making real the

statement of October 15<sup>th</sup> and thus prevent the country from falling into chaos with its resulting consequences.

At this time the good of the nation invites us to overcome this dangerous crisis of the government. Not only is the right, with their seduction and threats, a danger and without a doubt, the extreme right is the greatest danger, but there is also a great danger in the ambition for power. Who knows if the cause of this crisis is not the ambition for power? All the members of the government and the Armed Forces ought to rise above this temptation and ought to be discerning so as to see clearly the manipulations that can entangle them.

Enlightened people, filled with hope as a result of this very temptation to power, are committing many errors and the same could be said about leftist groups and popular organizations that have lost sight of the legitimate goal of their pressure tactics, a goal that ought to involve them in a search for the common good and not obedience to foreign slogans or some form of group fanaticism.

All sides, the government, the opposition, and the extreme right ought to put aside every form of partisanship and fanaticism, every ambition for power and privilege, all forms of selfishness and offer generosity and commitment so that people, from their proper field of competence, can work together to achieve the only just and noble objective that today is placed before all the people of El Salvador: the promotion of social justice for our people. In this way that which the Pope clearly described as barriers of exploitation<sup>26</sup> ... these barriers will be torn down.

Thus I address in a special way members of the government and the Armed Forces who ought to be struggling on behalf of the same objective: the people ... but in order to be clear about all of this we are speaking about people who are poor and on the margins of society whose dignity should be promoted here in El Salvador.

My brothers and sisters, with the arrival of a New Year I want to reaffirm here what I said on October 16<sup>th</sup> concerning the overthrow of the government: I saw in the statements of the Revolutionary Government a clarity of vision and their good intentions, but their vision and intentions had to be confirmed by actions. The people will be the judges of the government's actions. On that occasion I also stated that I was willing to enter into dialogue and collaboration, but I had one condition: such dialogue and collaboration had to be in service of the people. The service of the people is the only reason for which the Church and the government exist in the world. Therefore the government ought to serve the people. At that time opportunists either because of their profession or political affiliation or prejudice saw my words as a 180 degree turn about. I once again want to offer my service, dialogue and my collaboration because I am willing to see if actions truly confirm the good intentions of the government, to see if there really is a break with the past, and to see if the process that was initiated can change the ugly image of our nation ... a process that is meant to lead us forward rather than backward. Today a crisis has to be overcome and every crisis is overcome by a process of dying and living. This is a transcendental time and we must know how to live at this time, live with all the dignity of a civilized nation, live as people of good will.

The Pope has said: *truth is the power of peace*. In the name of the gospel of peace I invite all people to work together in truth and sincerity. Let us not only speak words and make promises but let us also make every effort to make a reality that which we know we can and ought to do for the good of the country.

Finally, in this atmosphere of family, I want to address those who are absent from their families: those who have been abducted. Perhaps it would be better to address those who are holding them captive: release them so that they might rejoice with their families. Specifically, I have a special message concerning the abduction of Archibald Dunn, the ex-ambassador of South Africa. The conditions that you have made for his release appear to be impossible and so it would be better to engage in negotiations and not proceed any further until the issue of conditions has been resolved. We are looking for conditions that can be fulfilled and I am attempting to dissuade you from continuing to demand conditions that cannot be met. One more urgent matter in this regard: I have been authorized to offer this beloved man who has been abducted, the ex-ambassador to South Africa, medical services. I beg those who are holding this man captive to make it possible for this doctor to see Mr. Dunn. If my services are necessary then once again I say that I am at your service.

My sisters and brothers, this is our family, a family that journeys in the world, a family with very distinct members, but from the Christian perspective we experience ourselves as a nucleus, as very close to God. We are the domestic church in the home and the great universal Church in the world: the parish, the diocese, and the base communities of faith. On this day when the liturgy offers us the beautiful message of the Holy Family, let each one of us, according to our own role as a member of the universal family, experience ourselves as sisters and brothers to one another and collaborate with all our sisters and brothers to make this world a paradise, an antechamber of the children of God and not a cage of fear. So be it.\*

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

<sup>2</sup> Homily of John Paul II in the Mass celebrated in Puebla de los Angeles, Mexico (28 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 1979.

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

<sup>4</sup> *Roman Missal*, Offertory.

<sup>5</sup> See 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.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> See Discourse of John Paul II to the Cardinals and Prelates of the Roman Curia (22 December 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 30 December 1979, and *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 December 1979.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> See *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Allocution at the *Angelus* (26 December 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 30 December 1979.

<sup>18</sup> Christmas Message (25 December 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 30 December 1979.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Government Decree N° 67. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 December 1979.

<sup>21</sup> Ley de emergencia sobre alquileres, See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 & 28 December 1979.

<sup>22</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 28 December 1979.

<sup>23</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica*, 24 December 1979.

<sup>24</sup> General José Alberto Medrano announced that ORDEN “had changed its name to Frente Democrático Nacionalista (FDN”. See Mensaje del Frente Democrático Nacionalista a los miembros del ORDEN”, *La Prensa Gráfica*, 27 December 1979.

<sup>25</sup> The march was organized by the Cruzada Pro Paz y Trabajo and supported by the FDN, See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 28 December 1979.

<sup>26</sup> See Discourse of John Paul II to the peasants and indigenous people of Oaxaca (29 January 1979), *Osservatore Romano*, 11 February 1979.



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*Marginal References* (1) Lk 2,52; (2) Jn 1,14; (3) Lk 2,48; (4) Lk 2,49; (5) Lk 2,49; (6) Mt 6,33; (7) Si 3,2; (8) Si 3,3; (9) Si 3,5; (10) Si 3,7; (11) Si 3,14; (12) Mt 25,40; (13) Si 3,15; (14) 2P 3,12; (15) Gn 1,26-27; (16) LG 11; (17) Col 3,12; (18) Gal 6,16; (19) Col 3,12; (20) Col 3,12-15; (21) Col 3,16-17; (22) Col 3,17; (23) P 583; (24) P 583; (25) P 583; (26) P 583; (27) Col 3,22-24; (28) P 240; (29) P 240.