

## THE EPIPHANY, GOD'S REVELATION TO ALL

**Feast of the Epiphany**  
**January 6, 1980**

*Isaiah 60:1-6*  
*Ephesians 3:2-3, 5-6*  
*Matthew 2:1-12*

My dear sisters and brothers.

Today the Christmas season reaches its culmination with the celebration of the feast of the Epiphany, a feast that like the splendor of the sun illuminates the world. We find in today's gospel characteristics that coincide with our situation and which, therefore, from the perspective of the Word of God, can illuminate our journey through our national history. When the Magi become lost in Jerusalem, they ask: *Where is the newborn king of the Jews?* (1). The gospel tells us: *When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled and all of Jerusalem with him. The Magi consulted with them and then once again set out on their journey.*

We could say that there was a crisis in the process itself. This crisis, like every other crisis, is resolved when people sincerely and with good faith seek a solution. When people seek a solution with evil in their hearts, then obstinacy and established positions will often stagnate the process. For the Magi, the disappearance of the star and their seeking advice in Jerusalem enabled them to set out anew on their journey and achieve happiness at the end of the process which ultimately enabled them to be filled with a profound joy. On the other hand, Herod, who had hidden ambitions for the throne and who, together with others, was greatly troubled before such a political perspective that might remove him from the throne, trembled and plotted the assassination of the child.

Today, in our country, we find ourselves in a crisis of process and so as for the Magi, this is the time when with good will all the people of El Salvador ought to ask: *where can we find the king for whom we search, the true savior of our country?* We will find him if we consult the Word of God and live with faith. Today in the liturgy of the Epiphany, the Lord has given us marvelous and enlightening hints for the solution.

*Epiphany* is a Greek word which means revelation. The mystery of the Nativity is a mystery of God who becomes present in the world and reveals himself to all people. It is not enough to know him in the silence of Christmas Eve, to know him in the person of the humble shepherds and in intimate embrace of Mary and Joseph. Jesus is born to save all people and thus needs to make himself known, needs to reveal himself, needs to be an epiphany. This is the meaning of today's celebration.

Thus we see that the Magi of today's gospel are the first persons in a long processional line and we, gathered here in the Cathedral or in our communities where we are reflecting together on this message ... we continue the process, we are the magi today, the magi of 1980. The Magi of twenty centuries ago were the first ones who received this knowledge of Christ: blessed are the people, blessed the women and men who find this revelation of Jesus!

Therefore the feast of the Epiphany is the celebration of the revelation of God so that people might adore him, recognize him and hope in him because only in him can people find salvation. It is for this reason that I said that for our country, this celebration, which gathers together all people in order to adore the true liberator, can be the time when our national crisis is resolved, can be the day when the Word of God enlightens those who seek God with sincere hearts. The Lord desires that this feast of the Epiphany be the guiding star of our people, a time when they consult the Word of God that enlightens our paths, a time when our crisis can be resolved and the process can be brought to a final conclusion.

I want to say that on this feast of the Epiphany, as on all other liturgical feasts and all other Sundays throughout the year, we do not gather here in the Cathedral because of some political, passing curiosity: how interesting to watch our history revolve Sunday after Sunday as we find ourselves in a different political, social and economic situation. If this is what we had to do on earth then look at how inconsistent, variable, and changeable would be our human journey. We could easily then be compared to the opportunists or those who walk according to the changing whims of the situation. But I repeat that the Church does not walk on these paths. Rather the Church follows a calm path, a path along which she is guided by the star of faith, a path that leads her to a destiny that is superior to the plans of this earth, a path that leads her to a goal that continues on even after all political movements have ceased to exist.

How inconsistent are human persons when they are supported by other people! Those who trusted that the Cabinet members were going to resolve everything might find themselves disillusioned as they witnessed the resignation of these people --- all the members of the Cabinet have just resigned. Those who placed their trust in another regime might feel as though they have been defrauded, can feel as though they have been victimized. My sisters and brothers, let us not live with these criteria but rather let us know how to enlighten all these realities with that which is eternal. The feast of the Epiphany inspired the liturgy of the Church and as a result we have a beautiful hymn in which we find Herod being addressed: *Why are you afraid, Herod? The one who is coming is not going to remove you from your temporal kingdom but rather gives all people an eternal kingdom.*<sup>1</sup> This is the greatness of Christianity. We do not live according to the whimsical movements of the earth. It is for this reason that I am insistent on saying to the Christian communities: above all else, maintain your faith in Christ; above all else, maintain your sense of transcendence and from the perspective of transcendence illuminate the realities that are imminent and transitory.

If we are mistaken in our political judgments, that is not important because the human person is fallible. What is important is to not be mistaken in matters of faith. What is important is to be faithful to the Word of God which should guide us in all situations. What is important is to have people so intimately renewed in heart that they are willing to serve people and from the perspective of their faith enlighten the temporal realities of the world. I ask the Lord for the following: *Give us, Lord, politicians of faith, government officials of faith, women and men of faith!* Structural change, no matter how profound, is useless unless these structures are managed by people of faith, people who know the relative value of temporal realities, people who know that the only absolute is the Kingdom of God.

That which like the sun comes now and illuminates and guides the steps of the Magi and the steps of all people is faith ... faith that is rooted in the heart, faith that gives us joy as a result of knowing Christ. Christ never fails because in every crisis and even in failure our joy remains since we have placed our trust in the One who can save us.

For this reason I want to entitle my homily: the *Epiphany: the revelation and donation of God to all people*. I will develop the following points: First, the Magi, the primacy of a universal call; Second, what God offers and gives to all people; Third, the Magi: an example of those who seek and find true liberation.

### **The Magi, primacy of a universal call**

First, the Magi are the first appearance of a people, of all people, the primacy of a universal call. In the second reading we see that Saint Paul is happy to be the apostle to the Gentiles. We should remember here that there was a wall that separated the Gentiles from participating in the cult of the Temple, a wall that was called the Wall of the Gentiles. This was a way of dividing the Jews, the chosen people, the children of God, the children of Abraham, the people who would be saved, from the Gentiles, foreigners and those who were referred to as dogs. Jews and Gentiles could not worship together. Saint Paul says: *Christ is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity* (2). The great mystery that Saint Paul proclaims is what he states with total clarity in the letter we have read today: *When you read this you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit* (3). What is the mystery: *that the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body, and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (4). What great news!

Brothers and sisters who fill this Cathedral, we are Gentiles. We do not belong to the Jewish people; we are descendants of pagans who populated these lands just five centuries ago --- primitive peoples, but God was thinking of us. Who could have told Christopher Columbus that on these virgin lands, filled with forests and animals and Indians, would appear our cathedrals, our shrines, our churches, a Christian civilization? What a great mystery. You too, Indians of America, are called to partake of the heritage of Christ; you too, blacks of Africa, and you too, people of Asia and all the world, you are called.

The Magi from the land of Asia, possibly from the land of Iran which is so problematic today ... these kings were possibly from this area and they were enlightened by news that was given to them by Jews who had immigrated to other areas or by Jews who were accompanied by Gentiles on their journey to celebrate the feasts in the Temple of Jerusalem. The prophet in the Old Testament had stated that the Kings would hear that from the house of Jacob a great star would arise. Here we find the origin of the star about which we are unable to give any natural or scientific explanation. These are the traditions of people who knew about a star. They had also heard that a King would arise from the lineage of David, a descendant of Abraham and this King would be born in Bethlehem: *You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah, too small to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel* (5). Thus we have the prophecy of Micah proclaiming that the kingdom that would begin in the humble town of Bethlehem would be extended *to all the ends of the earth*. (6) Perhaps this is what the Magi heard and perhaps this is the star that they envisioned in the small dawning of faith within their hearts. They had heard the news about some angels and shepherds and set out in search of the Lord.

*Magi from the East* (7) is the expression that appears in the gospel, but in light of the feast of the Epiphany we focus on the words of the prophet Isaiah and the fulfillment of the great prophesy: *Nations shall walk by your light ... and the wealth of the nations shall be brought to you. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah. All from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense and proclaiming the praises of the Lord ... they will be acceptable*

*offerings on my altar and I will enhance the splendor of my house.* (8) These figures of the prophets, announcing a mysterious and universal kingdom in a world divided into petty kingdoms and empires, have the upright in heart dreaming: “where is this great king going to be born?” And when these men, enlightened perhaps by their knowledge of astrology, seek the one to be born, they are the first signs of the fulfillment of this promise.

The feast of the Epiphany is great because on that day we celebrate the fact that the wall which divided the Jews who were the chosen people from all other people who were seen as illegitimate ... this wall was destroyed and now faith is no longer being passed on through the lineage of Abraham. No longer are people children of Abraham according to the flesh but rather will become the People of God and children of Abraham because they have the faith of Abraham. Here we see the beginning of that reality in the Magi who even though they were born in the Far East are considered children of Abraham because they found the same faith as Abraham and they also found the King.

It appears that here in the gospel Saint Matthew wants to describe how Christ was revealed and then known and more closely followed and loved by the Gentiles than by the Jews. Herod and those around his throne could have given some indication where Jesus could be found, but they remained indifferent. Herod, however was not indifferent, rather he wanted to know where the child was born so that he could go there and kill the child. *He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him, even though they were Gentiles, he gave power to become children of God* (8).

### **What God offers and gives to all people**

What does Christ, who is born and reveals himself and makes himself known to the Gentiles ... what does Christ offer? What does God offer? I believe three things are offered, three great gifts that should not be confused: first, individual gifts; second, social gifts; and third, a Church that administers these gifts of the Lord.

Today’s readings speak about individual gifts. I find in the words of the Magi a wonderful expression of people who desire to be faithful to their vocation: *Where is the newborn King of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage* (10). This is the first gift that God gives, the gift of vocation. My dear sisters and brothers, especially you beloved young women and men and children, like the Magi, ask yourselves: is this my star? Where do I find the full realization of my life? Where does God want me to be? All of us have a vocation. No woman or man is born without a vocation from God. We all have a place in history and to know that place and develop that place is to actualize one’s own personality. We will always be happy when we ask the question: What does God desire of me?

What other element is expressed by the Magi when they find the child? *They prostrated themselves and did him homage* (11). This is faith. Only faith can discover in a child held in a mother’s arms the Redeemer, God, the King for whom they were searching ... and the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh are expressions of faith, the first fruits of Christian liturgy. We incense our altars and our chalices are made of gold and myrrh is the sign of redemption which requires sacrifice from the people. We do not preach without referring to myrrh, detachment and bitterness, and it is for this reason that it is difficult for people to understand our message.

What else do the Magi receive? The gospel states explicitly that *they were overjoyed at seeing the star* (12). Happiness is so lacking in our time. Why? Because there is no faith and because we

are not aware of God as the source of our happiness. This is one of the signs of being with God, for even in the midst of the difficulties of history we are joyful because the Lord is near. The Magi experienced this joy.

In today's second reading Saint Paul fills out this scene of personal gifts. We have been made coheirs of the promises that God made to Abraham. (13) These promises are ours when we have faith because we are children of God who have been redeemed by Christ and promised eternal life. This is not an illusion even though it is not understood by those lacking faith. For us, however, it is the motive behind our struggles and efforts. These promises enable us to work with greater energy than anyone else because our reward is greater than that which people without faith and hope await.

Saint Paul says: *this is the great mystery that was revealed to us, namely that you, the Gentiles, are members of the same body* (14). The Gentiles are now incorporated into Christ. Through Baptism which the missionaries brought to these lands, our ancestors and indigenous peoples became members of Christ. We are also members of Christ regardless of our race, because what is important is to be a member of Christ. *Now there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or master, not even man or woman ... only one thing matters: to be a member of Christ.* (15) This is the great equality that Christianity preaches and that is so needed in the midst of our national problems: the equality of the children of God.

Saint Paul also states that *we are copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel* (16). Let us embrace the gospel more and more because if we allow ourselves to be led by the words of the gospel we become a sign that the procession of the Magi continues today among us.

My sisters and brothers, in a word, each one of you, like me, ought to experience these gifts of a personal character in the depths of your personality. I invite you today to participate in an exercise that is similar to that of the Magi. The Vatican Council states that each person has a depth to his/her being, their conscience, which is like a secret room where God descends to speak with individuals and where these individuals then decide their destiny. (17) Let us go down, like the Magi, to the depths of our being and find Christ there in our hearts! Let us not look for him outside of ourselves but let us look for him within ourselves. In this way we will find that we are able to speak about the role that we are to undertake during this historic time in El Salvador. We have much to give because God is with each one of us.

*Gifts of a social character.* The first reading from the book of Isaiah presents us with a beautiful description: *Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! The people who walked in darkness ... see, light has come! The glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick clouds cover the peoples, but upon you the Lord shines and over you appears his glory* (18). The greatest good that God can do for people is to gift them with faith. Ah, for the people who lack faith and walk in darkness: *the thick clouds cover the peoples but upon you the Lord shines.*

*Nations shall walk by your light and kings by your shining radiance* (19). Blessed are the people who have Christian government officials! Blessed are the people whose rulers adore the King and the Lord of history and who discover in this King and Lord what God desires of them! Blessed are the people whose rulers are not tyrants but administrators of the will of God ... God who desires happiness and light for all people.

What other gifts have a social character? The gift of universal unity: *Raise your eyes and look about: your sons come from afar and your daughters in the arms of their nurses ... the wealth of nations shall be brought to you* (20). When we reflect upon the Catholic faith which is shared by

so many people, we come to the realization that this gift of faith is not given so that people become enraptured with that which is physical but rather it is meant to purify and elevate and give all peoples and all reality and every way of being a divine and eternal meaning. The church in El Salvador does not want us to live in uniformity with the church of Rome or the church of Asia or the church in any other part of the world. Respecting the nature of the people of El Salvador, the Church as the Church of El Salvador wishes to raise up people and their history and values and work and gifts. We, the Christians of El Salvador, are empowered to say that we are authentic citizens of this nation and therefore our faith does not alienate us from the realities of this world but rather purifies all that is great and good in us ... all that is great and good in every people. For this reason the Church preaches the mission and teaches missionaries not to bring some form of imperialism to people to impose upon their culture but rather missionaries are invited to share the gift of their faith which in turn will purify the cultures of all people.

Liberators who want to impose foreign ideologies betray our national identity. The Church will never betray people by imposing an ideology of Marxist inspiration or some other ideology that alienates and/or has no connection with the very nature of our people. Thanks to God, that which is Christian is deeply rooted in the souls of the people of El Salvador. From the Christian perspective people are provided with the seeds of authentic development and authentic liberation. This gives the Christian faith of our people a dimension of universal unity that respects the nature of people's differences.

And thirdly, what does God give us as a result of the promises that we have just heard proclaimed in the readings? God gives us a Church that has been *entrusted with the administration of God's gifts that are to be shared with people*. I am delighted today by the person of Mary who bears the child Jesus in her arms and offers him to the Magi who then adore him. This appears to me to be a beautiful image of the Church that offers Christ to all people. Mary and the Church are one single entity. Mary is the beautiful image of the Church and the Church sees Mary as a model for achieving the objectives of her ministry and a model for a way of life for all redeemed persons. Thus Mary and the Church are present in this gift of God and in this revelation of God and therefore the Church is able to say: if you want to find Christ, do not separate yourself from the Church. Today Saint Paul has said: *the mystery of Christ was not made known to human beings in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit* (21). In other words, through the ministers of the Church and, through the Church herself, people are able to know God and be redeemed with Christ's redemption.

It is good to be mindful of this great doctrine because there is a current of thought that would lead us to believe that the hierarchy and their teaching can be ignored and that the people are most important ... this is the people's Church. Yes, the people are the object of our ministry and Christ established his Church for people. The Council states that the Church is the seed of the Kingdom of God that saves all people (22). The Church is God's instrument that announces his kingdom to all people.

My dear Christian communities, I would like you to have a clear idea and a holy pride in the following: being docile to and in communion with the bishop and the Pope in no way is a betrayal of the people but is rather a guarantee that the people will have the Kingdom of God proclaimed to them. Please, my beloved Catholic sisters and brothers and, above all, my beloved Christian communities: do not separate yourselves from the saints, the apostles and prophets and the teaching that you received from the Holy Spirit, a teaching that has charged you with proclaiming the fact that all people are called to be redeemed in Christ and to receive the great gifts of redemption.

The time when a priest or a community, a catechist or pastoral minister prefers the caprice of people over the inspiration of the Church's teaching is the time when such people are no longer Church but are proclaiming a worldly, human doctrine. If we want to be in union with the doctrine that came down from heaven through Jesus Christ, with the doctrine that gives the world the life and holiness that Jesus brought to earth, then we have to use the channels that Jesus has given us when he said: *Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me* (23). Jesus desired to unite the ministry of his Church with the happiness of people which results from fidelity to God. Let us then beg the Lord to be a Church that is truly servant and faithful and let us all, even though we are sinners, seek true conversion that enables us to be more faithful instruments of the Church of God that desires to save the world.

### **The Magi: an example of those who seek and find true the Lord**

Finally my third thought on why God revealed and gave himself in the Epiphany is this: the Magi, an example of those who seek and find the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Not everyone finds the Lord but the Magi give us a wonderful example that I believe also gives us the key to finding temporal happiness. Everyone who profoundly experiences this moment of political crisis in our nation should look in the mirror of the Magi. Even though you may give no thought to the feast of the Epiphany, even though you may not be Christian yet I believe you can find in the Christian and political example of the Magi an example that will make our country happy, the only one able to redeem our nation.

First, *detachment*, to unsettle oneself. The Magi see the star, experience the call of God and set out on the road. This is important. I believe many people speak about changes in El Salvador but do not want to change anything. Those who are most culpable and those who wield economic power do not want to detach themselves from their possessions in order to enable the country to find happiness. Without this sense of detachment, happiness will never be found. There are other people who have created an idol out of power and they want to hold on to their power and are not willing to share their power with other citizens ... these individuals are called to seek the common good of our nation.\* There are others who will say that they have undertaken the journey, but that is not enough! What are you, members of political parties and popular organizations, what are you seeking as you carry out your strategies? Have you detached yourselves from your way of thinking in order to enter into dialogue with others and in order to enter into a search for the common good? Do your worship yourselves or the people?\*

This detachment is necessary. The Magi would never have experienced the joy of knowing the King of the universe if they had not set aside their personal comforts, their palaces, their thrones (that is, if they really were kings) and then set out on a long and, certainly in that time in history, an uncomfortable journey.

The Magi would not have reached their goal if there was not present another element (detachment was not enough), the element of *seeking*, humble seeking. No one should think that he/she knows everything. The Magi arrive in Jerusalem and they are confused and feel the need to inquire and search for answers and so they approach Herod. Herod did not have the answer and so he consulted with the experts in the scriptures. No one but God knows the whole truth. Those who want to walk in truth have to be humble and seek for the truth with others. In the process of dialogue we cannot impose our way of thinking. Through dialogue we find in the response of another that which is lacking in ourselves: the search, the seeking. *Where is the newborn King of the Jews?* (24). When one is looking for something as great as the common good of the nation, then, like the Magi who were seeking the King of the universe, it is worthwhile to forget about self-love and focus on the good of the people and the good of the Lord.

Besides the detachment and the seeking of the magi we find in them another essential element, that of *adoration*. When they find Jesus, then like humble men before the majesty of God, they take off their crowns, kneel and adore him. (25) Only Christ who is the Lord, only he should be adored! Blessed are those who kneel before the only one before whom we should kneel! We should think about this fact when dealing with the idolatries of the world. I have denounced these idolatries many times and it is sufficient here to remind you that there are people who have made idols of wealth and money and are incapable of adoring God because they adore their money. There are others who have made an idol of power and are capable of manipulating others because of their ambitions for power. There are others who have made an idol of their way of thinking so that their only focus is on “my party” or “my organization.” These forms of idolatry impede us from knowing and worshipping the only God who saves, the only God who can save.

### **Life of the Church**

Here, my dear brothers and sisters, we have the gospel criteria that should guide our ecclesial community and at the same time criteria that, from the perspective of the gospel, should also guide us as we look at our national reality.

As we look at the ecclesial realities of this past week I rejoice with the community of Tonacatepeque which last Sunday celebrated a beautiful First Communion and Confirmation. A wonderful presentation of gifts resembled the procession of the Magi as the fruits of the earth, very generous gifts, were deposited on the altar.

I was also pleased with the celebration in which more than eight thousand people gathered together in the National Gymnasium to bring to a close a weekend of renewal in the Spirit.

Also last Sunday, the feast of the Holy Family, the Marriage Encounter Movement celebrated a beautiful fiesta during which they evaluated and planned their ministry to families.

I was unable to attend the ceremony of the Catechumenal Movement last Sunday but I was told that this was also a very beautiful celebration.

I also want to make note here of the visit of Cardinal Aloísio Lorscheider, the Archbishop of Fortaleza, Brazil. He spent three days with us and without a doubt was charged by the Holy Father to gather some further information as to the situation of the Church in Central America. He came from Nicaragua and then left for Costa Rica and I was greatly pleased by his approval of the work that we are doing. He told me that he had read my Pastoral Letters and several of my homilies and felt that their teaching was correct. I feel in this visit of this new envoy of the Pope a further confirmation of the work our Archdiocese is doing.\*

For this reason I am very happy to have received a telegram yesterday that is an honor for all of you. Here in our midst this morning are the persons who communicated me the news. I have not yet received the letter but in their name I want to tell you this news so that you can experience how this news is received here in the Cathedral. The telegram is from Stockholm: *Archbishop Romero, San Salvador. The Swiss Ecumenical Movement has decided to honor you and your Church with the 1980 Peace Prize. We do this because of the significant ways in which you have promoted justice and reconciliation among people and also for your defense of human rights. A letter will arrive.\**



I want to communicate to you some more information that is personal and so I ask you to pray for a good friend of mine who died in San Miguel. Don Joaquín Ernesto Cárdenas was a writer, historian and a great collaborator with the Church in San Miguel. I also ask your prayers for the mother of the ambassador to the Holy See, Dr. Prudencio Lach, who died. We extend our condolences to their families and we offer our prayers for the eternal rest of their souls.

Our Church which is united with the universal Church found support this week for its work on behalf of peace. It is wonderful to see the Pope and the teaching of several bishops coincide in a call for peace. As the Pope concluded his call for peace he heard the President support him in his condemnation of terrorism and the arms race.<sup>3</sup>

The Pope, speaking on January 1<sup>st</sup>, the Day of Peace, made reference to the nightmare of a nuclear war. The Holy Father said: *We are thinking of the cities and villages, in the West and at the same time in the East, which with the means of destruction already known could be reduced to heaps of rubble and expose people to dangerous and unknown consequences such as genetic mutations.*<sup>4</sup> He then went on to say: *War is always made to kill and is against the nature of the human person. People of the world must be told about the terrible nightmare that would result from a nuclear war.*<sup>5</sup> He pointed out some statistics when he said: *Nuclear war would cause death, by direct or delayed action of explosions, of a population that might range from 50 to 200 million persons, a drastic reduction of food resources caused by residual radioactivity over a wide extent of arable land and considerable changes in the ozone layer in the atmosphere which would expose people to major risks, harmful to their life*<sup>6</sup>. We are not experts in matters of war and arms but as the Pope looks at humanity and the Church he feels that he has a responsibility to raise his voice so that people do not make the error of letting loose these forces of destruction.

On the occasion of the Day of Peace and as a result of several abuses committed against the Church, the bishops of Brazil called upon people to live more intimately together as brothers and sisters. A cardinal from Brazil, Vicente Scherrer, was personally attacked and wounded. In the hospital he stated: *They wanted money but I only had 50.00 reales to buy gasoline.* Not satisfied with this amount of money his attackers began to beat and punch the prelate and then drove off in a car. All his clothes were taken and he was left nude in the street. As you have read in the newspapers and seen on the news, thanks to a passerby who warned the police, immediate assistance was given to him.<sup>7</sup>

Our brother, the Archbishop of Nicaragua on the occasion of the first of January and under the motto: *Truth, the power of peace*, condemned every form of exploitation of the human person by others and by the state. He condemned the manipulation of the media as contrary to the freedom of the individual. Archbishop Orando says that *those who return hatred for hatred are not human persons but beasts. Neither hatred nor brutality nor vengeance will bring us peace.*<sup>8</sup>

The Bishops of Spain published a statement on January 1<sup>st</sup> and made reference to the problem of violence: *We feel that we have an obligation to address you on those matters that might lead to the pacification of our people. God wants to make the offer effective so that we might be able to achieve complete peace.*<sup>9</sup> Note this carefully and hopefully those persons who are so devoted to violence will listen: *To those among us who believe that armed violence is necessary in order to achieve the transformation of the social-political reality according to their ideals, we say to them: put aside this attitude. We cannot accept the fact that the future of our people will result from the imposition of violence forced by those who have the power to do this. Rather open yourselves to rational criteria and paths because these will lead to the establishment of a just order that people need.*<sup>10</sup>

On this feast of the Epiphany when we find ourselves in a world that is in upheaval we stand before the international threat of an invasion of Afghanistan by Russia. In our own country the spiral of violence that we experienced this week in assassinations, burnings, the attack on the central headquarters of the Guardia Nacional and military operations ... all of these make us, like the Magi, ask the Lord: *Where is the King of Peace, our Lord?*. We find ourselves in a situation that is worthwhile analyzing so that we might learn a lesson.

### Events of the week

All of you are aware of the events of last week and so I will mention them briefly. Remember last Sunday that in my homily I pointed out that there was an internal crisis in the government because government officials were accused of being influenced by elements of the right, by the Armed Forces and the oligarchy. On Sunday night, December 30<sup>th</sup> we heard the statement of the majority of the Cabinet and other officials that was addressed to the Permanent Council of the Armed Forces. They stated that their presence and collaboration with the government was conditional and would be determined by the fulfillment of certain demands that had been placed on the Armed Forces: to correct the government's movement to the right and to return to the lines of action announced on October 15<sup>th</sup>, lines of action which the Ministers had committed themselves to.

The thinking of the Ministers is clear: *The present control of the Armed Forces is not the control that was originally agreed to at the time of the establishment of a new political project. Those who are in charge of the Ministry of Defense and some commanders in the military are exercising military power in a way that is not in accord with the plans of the Junta and in ways that are opposed to the original plans initiated by the Junta and the younger members of the military.*<sup>11</sup> In stating their demands, the Cabinet asked the younger members of the military to define who is commanding them and they denounced the existence of a parallel government which explains many of the deplorable attitudes that we have witnessed during these days.

On Monday, December 31<sup>st</sup>, several members of the Cabinet asked the Chancery to intervene and as a result of this the Junta and the Cabinet members who have signed the above mentioned statement were called together for a meeting that took place on January 2<sup>nd</sup>. As you are able to read in today's edition of *Orientación*<sup>12</sup>, the meeting of January 2<sup>nd</sup> was very friendly, informal and an exchange of impressions. My position and presence in the meeting was one of representing the great majority of the people who trust in the Church and therefore I was present as a representative of the Archdiocese. My action was one of enlightening the discussion with the gospel and so I asked those present to examine the root of the problem, to see where they are in agreement and disagreement and how they can overcome the present division for the sake of the ideal of the good of the people.

I asked them to fulfill the commitment that they made with the people so that the people who for so long have been disillusioned might not be deceived once again. I thanked them for their good will in accepting my invitation. I know that my intervention could be misunderstood but I want to make it clear that I was greatly pleased to be able to offer my pastoral and evangelical service at a critical moment in our history as a nation.

My last recommendation at this honorable meeting was the following: do not act according to your emotions or allow yourselves to be manipulated but rather listen to your own conscience and in accord with your own critical conscience decide what must be done and then we shall respect your decision.

When this meeting was concluded the response of the Permanent Council of the Armed forces was heard on radio. They had continued the dialogue that had been begun earlier that day and continued talking until about three o'clock in the afternoon<sup>13</sup>. I believe they didn't even send their response but the ministers themselves had to send for it.

The resignations followed later. On our Catholic radio station YSAX we commented on these resignations<sup>14</sup>: *Why did they resign? The minority stated: they resigned in order to allow for the restructuring of the Cabinet of the Junta. In a certain sense these were courtesy resignations or resignations that followed good political manners. But the majority of the members of the Junta, Ministers and sub-secretaries and other state officials renounced their positions as a protest and thus the resignations should be seen as something negative.*

*Their protest was against the High Command of the Armed Forces which, according to them, had abandoned the spirit of October 15<sup>th</sup> and the previous statements of the Armed Forces and was now serving the interest of the economic oligarchy. The resignation of all these individuals was directed toward the Armed Forces and was a protest against the manner in which the High Command is proceeding with the process of establishing order. This was their intention and their resignation should be understood in this manner.*

*Their resignation says that they will no longer continue to participate in an ethically doubtful project, a project that prefers the repression of people over the proposed reforms and thus sees repression as a way of resolving our problems. The individuals who resigned will no longer participate in a political process that is becoming more and more unpopular.*

*This is the general tone that was expressed with more or less force in the letters of resignation. Their letters express their protest and their rejection of the actions of some military leaders who have become well known in the course of these events. These officials who resigned opt for a true popular political project, one that is sincerely radical.*

With these resignations we have what we might, for all practical purposes, call a military government since there are two colonels and the previous Minister of Defense, which is also quite significant.

Among these events we know that the Christian Democratic Party has been invited to offer an alternative solution and has proposed a series of political, economic and military conditions. According to the words of the Party: *Our plan is not opposed to the statement of the Armed Forces but rather develops and makes their statement more concrete. Our plan is not opposed to the ministerial document of December 28<sup>th</sup>*<sup>15</sup>.

These are the facts. In light of these events there naturally arises several questions: Have the doors that were opened now been closed as a result of these actions? For two months these doors were maintained wide open by a group of men who were esteemed for their honesty and integrity even though the movement from left to right was an attempt to also sway them in a different direction. Is there any hope? What will happen to the land reform that was initiated? Will the new Cabinet continue to implement this reform? Will the new Minister of Agriculture take up this reform as a priority? Or will the new Minister be afraid of the threats that were made real when the house of the ex-Minister, Don Enrique Alvarez, was machine gunned (this event was not made known to the public by the press or television or radio)? What will happen to the process of the nationalization of exterior trade of coffee and sugar? What will happen to the law that suppressed ORDEN? Will their members once again become active? Will they appear now under a new name

as announced by one of the generals?<sup>16</sup> In fact this group has continued to operate and more recently has had recourse to military attacks that were supported by members of the Guardia Nacional. What will happen to the pressing problem of political prisoners and those who have disappeared?

We are anguished also when the Investigating Commission<sup>17</sup> states that they are hurrying their report *given the development of events that occurred in recent days and now the mission that had been entrusted to us appears to be ineffective. Therefore, we have reason to believe that it is appropriate to conclude our work sooner rather than later and declare this commission dissolved.*<sup>18</sup> Once again, however, it is always the people who remain in a state of anxiety.

At this moment I want to restate my conviction, as a man of hope, that a new ray of salvation will appear. I want to encourage those who have the kindness to listen to me to have the same conviction. No one has the right to sink into despair. As Christians, we all have the duty to seek together new channels and to hope actively. These events and these questions lead me to make the following pastoral appeal, which is my intent in what I am about to say to you. What must be saved before all is our people's movement toward liberation. The people have begun a movement which has already cost much blood and which must not be wasted. The crisis in this movement must be resolved by making the movement succeed. That is what we must seek. As we reflect on today's gospel we could say that the star which should guide the people, the government, and different sectors of our society is the following: how can we make the process that has been initiated by the people, one that leads us all to social justice, that saves and moves forward and therefore not a process that becomes stagnated and atrophied.

From this perspective and in the first place I direct my words to those responsible for the government, to the Government Junta which at this time together with the Armed Forces has control of power in our country: there must be a return to the previously stated objectives and a clarification of the objectives that you will pursue. All authority has a moral force which, while respecting the pluralism and freedom of the people, should also unite the diverse social forces in a search for the common good. This is the great task that is placed before you.

I want to remind the government that at this time there are two axes upon which this unity can rest. One axis is the Armed Forces and a desire to do everything to save the Armed Forces. This, however, is not authentic for the people\*. The other axis is the common good of the people. This calls popular organizations to come together. If you respond to this axis (and the people truly desire this), then all can join their forces together to save the people.\*

I also want to address the ministers and other officials who resigned. In the beginning you were accused of being precipitous, of being caught up in emotions, of being surprised by some political maneuver for power. Before all else I would say that we have to thank you for your service and for placing all your abilities at the service of the people. To judge your actions it is necessary to enter in your own conscience, but only you can do that. For my part, I believe that the approach that you outlined in your letters of resignation (some of which have expressed different ideas), namely that out of loyalty you are leaving your government positions so that better people could be elected ... I believe all of this is valid. You also agree in stating that you are unable to continue your work in an atmosphere where there is a parallel government, in a situation where the initial process is no longer being followed. Reaffirm your desires for change but also do so within the framework of democratic order and pacifism. The resignation of the Cabinet and other high officials, and the resignation of Dr. Ungo and Mayorga Quirós has been seen by many as the action of men of integrity and honesty even though previously these same men were called traitors and turncoats. In

this regard I want to ratify the judgment of those persons who from the beginning merited my esteem because of their integrity and honesty\*. I was convinced that their honesty would not allow them to be manipulated and that at the proper time they would know how to say “no”. We are grateful to them for their witness.\*

Those who resigned because of loyalty offer hope that should encourage the government to seek a solution in accord with the lines of action that they had initially adopted. Therefore I believe that in honesty and in witness of the fact that one is seeking the true good, the Minister of Defense should also resign.\* His continued presence can signify to the outside world that he is a tainted element of the government and the Armed Forces and can also signify a true hindrance to the government.\*

I respect, I repeat, I respect the option of the members of the Cabinet who judged the situation from their position within the government. We are only able to judge the situation from outside but for two months these men lived within the system and are able to make a better judgment. Their judgment is a clear call to not deceive the people, which means that they are calling the government to support the people in their just demands. Thus they see their departure from the government not as a failure but as a withdrawal strategy in order to return to the process that the people had entrusted to them\*.

I want to speak specifically to the members of the Armed Forces. Beneath the content of the responses of the Armed Forces to the civilian population it seems to me that there is an exaggerated idolizing of their own institution. Beloved members of the military, you must keep in mind that every institution, including the military institution, has to serve the people. The good of the people demands a change in the infrastructure and the rules of every institution. Every institution should be willing to engage in the process of change on behalf of the demands of the common good of people. The aspirations of people should not be strangled because of some absurd organizational laws. We can say the same about laws and other law codes ... if there is not a willingness to adapt to the time in which we are living and adapt to the actual needs of people then at a given time these laws and law codes can appear to be rigid and out of touch with reality and without meaning. The disinterested service of people that is manifested through structural change is what will create the true unity that the Armed Forces have appealed to.

As long as we continue to experience a tendency and a temptation to move to the right, as long as we experience the manipulation by the oligarchy which is accustomed to use the army according to their pleasure in order to defend their interests, interests that are opposed to the interests of the people, then everything else is a myth because I believe that in the Armed Forces there are noble people, sincere and just people who are able to overcome these temptations and capable of “feeling” with the people instead of being exclusively identified with their institution. We want to see action and at the preset time their actions speak of repression and manipulation ... their actions speak of great manipulation by the oligarchy\*.

In this regard Legal Aid has received various complaints and therefore in the name of human rights it is necessary to continue to denounce these abuses so that the Church might always be the star of the East. On Saturday, December 29<sup>th</sup> members of the army, the Guardia Nacional, the Treasury Police and ORDEN invaded the villages of El Terrero, Conacaste, San José el Amatillo and other towns in the jurisdiction of Las Vueltas in the Department of Chalatenango. Leftist groups had assassinated former members of ORDEN and this action is to be condemned in the same way that we must also condemn the actions that followed, actions that went beyond the boundaries of self-defense. The military occupation of this area continued until December 31<sup>st</sup> and during this

time the following people were assassinated: the *campesinos* José Alas and Armanda Rodríguez from the village of El Terrero, Próspero Guardado and Victor Manuel Guardado from the village of La Laguna. At the same time Próspero Melgar, Josefina Guardado and a two year old child and another eight year old child were arrested and taken to an unknown destination. The houses of people were destroyed, pigs and other domestic animals were slaughtered with machetes, corn and beans and clothing and others possessions were stolen. We ask that these actions be investigated and that those who are responsible for this be punished. We also ask for the release of those persons who have been detained. As a result of the military operations that were mounted in order to defend the headquarters of the Guardia Nacional many people were wounded and others killed. In the Church of Divina Providencia in Colonia Atlacatl the doors to the convent were pushed open and the priest's house was needlessly searched.

I want to speak a word to the popular organization as well as the military organizations. You are a social and political force. I have previously reminded you about the text in the Medellin documents (26) which states that the people have a right to organize themselves in order to pressure the government to act in a way that they would not do without the support of these social forces. As we have stated in our Pastoral Letters, I believe that membership in these organizations is a legitimate right of people who seek for ways to participate in the political process. Therefore, I reaffirm the call I made before: Do not abuse the power of your organization and evaluate your tactics and strategies so that they serve the common good. Do not seek vengeance or make your organization an idol. The call that I made before and that I have repeated many times, I state here once again: use your ability for dialogue because at this time there is such a great need for dialogue. I would like all the different organizations to feel a desire to collaborate together on behalf of the liberation of people and thus contribute to this process by entering into an honest dialogue in a search for the common good of all people of good will. You have seen sincerity in the new government's position. I believe this opens our eyes so that we do not become so dogmatic but rather so that we can open ourselves and for the love of our beloved people enter into dialogue with one another.

The people in general have identified themselves neither with the extreme right nor the extreme left ... I want to congratulate these people who, despite their need for these social forces, have not supported those groups that propose violence and insanity. Our people are very wise and know how to discern and know the difference between true and false liberation. Our people know how to await those who offer the true liberation that they need. Therefore I call out to all those who form this enormous multitude and who find themselves between two extremes in which they seek their place in order to participate in the common political activity of our nation. Seek your vocation and in light of the Word of God, reflect. Now is the time when people have to bring to light new initiatives and new methods. It is not necessary to adopt established channels but rather there are other approaches where Christian inspiration is able to lead our people, approaches that are profoundly Christian. In this I am speaking about one of the suggestions in the Medellin documents that refers to the *conscientizacion* of people and the need for organization and ways for people to participate so that they do not remain passive spectators, but rather become the architects of their own destiny. (27) I believe that those who truly want to govern people and seek the common good have to rely on the sincere participation of the noble people of El Salvador. They cannot use the people to climb some ladder and then forget about the people whom, as government officials, they are obliged to serve.

Finally, to the oligarchy, I repeat what I said before: do not look on me as a judge or enemy. I am only the shepherd, the brother, the friend of this people, the one who knows their suffering, their hunger and their afflictions. In the name of their voices, I raise my own to say: do not make idols

of your riches, do not preserve them in a way that lets others die of hunger. One must share in order to be happy. Cardinal Lorscheider gave a very graphic image when he said: *one has to know how to remove the ring from one's finger so that people do not cut off the finger*. I believe this is a very intelligent expression. Those who do not know how to take the ring from their fingers run the risk of having their hands cut off. Those who do not want to give and share out of love and social justice run the risk of having their possessions taken away from them by violence.\*

We have a concrete case to denounce this week. On January 3<sup>rd</sup> the workers at Grival, S.A. de C.V. and FUTESA S.A. de C.V., were publicly advised that the companies could no longer continue to pay them and as a result more than one hundred families have been left with no income<sup>19</sup>. I know that those who administer these companies can sustain their workers and during these difficult times it is not necessary to obtain the same profits as in better times. What was previously obtained as profit ... why not offer these profits as part of the common sacrifice that today the history of El Salvador asks of us. In that way people can sustain themselves and we will not create more hunger and poverty. Let us go forth in search of the path that will resolve this situation.

Like Jerusalem, our country is also *corban*. Government officials and people disturb us as we attempt to make our future a reality but we, as a Church of hope and in imitation of the Magi, know that the King is in some part of the world. Today we have pointed out several paths that political experts have to follow if they want to encounter the true liberator of the people. I speak especially to all the priests of the country: open your hearts to Jesus Christ! Allow the King of Peace to enter and submit yourselves to him! With the humility of the Magi, with humble hearts seek the King of Peace and then we shall encounter the true solution to the problems of our nation.

This is the meaning of the feast of the Epiphany for El Salvador. God has called us to salvation and to happiness and God does not deceive us. At the same time God asks us to be detached, to seek him, to be humble consulters, to detach ourselves from that which we most desire so that we can find that which is most important and most valuable: the Lord and the happiness of our people. So be it\*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Crudelis Herodes*, a hymn from vespers on the Feast of the Epiphany.

<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the homily Mons. Romero expressed his third thought as follows: "The Magi, example of those who seek and find *true liberation*".

<sup>3</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 3 January 1980.

<sup>4</sup> Homily for the Feast of the Holy Mother of God, World Day of Peace (1 January 1980), *Osservatore Romano*, 6 January 1980.

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

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

<sup>7</sup> See *Diario Latino*, 2 January 1980.

<sup>8</sup> *El Mundo*, 4 January 1980.

<sup>9</sup> It was a Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of the Basque Country. See *Ecclesia* 1965 (1980), p. 45.

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

<sup>11</sup> "El gabinete de Gobierno, magistrados de la Corte Suprema de Justicia y funcionarios de las instituciones autónomas de las Fuerzas Armadas por intermedio del COPEFA", *ECA* 375-376, (1980), pp. 117-119.

<sup>12</sup> See "Servicio de la Iglesia ante la crisis del Gobierno", *Orientación*, 6 January 1980.

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<sup>13</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 3 January 1980.

<sup>14</sup> On 31 December 1979 the Minister of Work, Gabriel Gallegos Valdés, resigned; on 2 January 1980 the Ministers of Education and Agriculture, Salvador Samayoa and Enrique Alvarez Córdova, as well as several high officials also resigned; on January 3 Guillermo Manuel Ungo and Román Mayorga Quirós, civilian members of the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno resigned together with the remaining ministers except Coronel José Guillermo García, minister of Defense; finally on January 4 the last of the civilians in the Junta, Mario Antonio Andino, also resigned. See *El Mundo*, 2 January 1980; *La Prensa Gráfica*, 3 and 4 January 1980; *El Diario de Hoy*, 5 January 1980.

<sup>15</sup> *El Mundo*, 5 January 1980.

<sup>16</sup> General José Alberto Medrano. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 27 December 1979.

<sup>17</sup> Comisión Especial Investigadora de Reos y Desaparecidos Políticos.

<sup>18</sup> See *El Diario de Hoy*, 4 January 1980.

<sup>19</sup> See *El Mundo*, 3 January 1980.

*Marginal References* (1) Mt 2,2-3; (2) Ep 2,14; (3) Ep 3,5; (4) Ep 3,6; (5) Mi 5,1; (6) Mi 5,3; (7) Mt 2,1; (8) Is 60,3.5-6; (9) Jn 1,11-12; (10) Mt 2,2; (11) Mt 2,11; (12) Mt 2,10; (13) Ep 3,6a; (14) Ep 3,6b; (15) Gal 3,28; (16) Ep 3,6c; (17) GS 16; (18) Is 60,1-2; (19) Is 60,3; (20) Is 60,4-5; (21) Ep 3,5; (22) LG 5; (23) Lk 10,16; (24) Mt 2,2; (25) Mt 2,11; (26) M 2,18; (27) M 2,18.