

## BAPTISM, REVELATION OF MESSIANIC GIFTS

**The Baptism of the Lord**  
**January 13, 1980**

*Isaiah 2:1-4, 6-7*

*Acts 10:34-48*

*Luke 3:15-16, 21-22*

My dear sisters and brothers, the announcement that we were going to make concerning the Ecumenical Week, will be done after the homily. Also, during the homily one of the Sisters is going to give a witness talk.

This is the feast of the Lord's baptism. My dear sisters and brothers, as I speak about baptism I experience the peacefulness and joy of one who arrives home and who together with his family remembers his childhood and origins. How necessary today is this peacefulness of the family especially when in our surroundings we find so much upheaval. Indeed, when persecution and storms afflict us, we experience even more profoundly the need to be united as a family. On this day when we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord, I invite you to recognize the fact that the baptism of Jesus is the cradle from which arises the family of God. There we are born as the People of God, as the family of God. As we come together to celebrate Mass on Sunday we should experience this event as our coming together on the weekend to be united with God, our Father, with our brother, Jesus Christ and with all our sisters and brothers. We need to breathe in this air of love, peacefulness and joy, this air of being at home.

Baptism makes citizens of a nation on earth citizens of the Kingdom of God. Our birth certificate can be found in the town hall because we are citizens of a specific nation on earth. But we also have a baptismal certificate which can be found in the parish. There we have the baptismal font which we might also call the cradle of our birth into the parish. As I say this I am not establishing an opposition between civil and religious matters but rather I am attempting to show their complementarity. Indeed, at this time when people speak about "The people!" "The people!" I attempt to clarify the meaning of these words. We, as Christians, have to distinguish between the People of God and people in general. We do this not to separate ourselves from or alienate ourselves from the civil, political, social and economic problems that we must confront as citizens of the earth. Indeed, as people of El Salvador, we cannot marginalize ourselves from these realities. But beside the reality of El Salvador and beside our birth certificate we belong to another kingdom which does not marginalize us from our country but rather gives us the capacity and special insight, gives us new and original criteria so that we can work with all citizens of this earth. Let us know how to be the leaven of the Kingdom of God in our society and among the people of El Salvador.

Today, as we meditate on the baptism of Jesus and on our own baptism, we should recognize that our own identity as people, born into the Kingdom of God, is found in our baptism. We should not betray our citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Those who work on behalf of the kingdom of the earth and see some contradiction in being a Christian and being a political citizen ... these individuals do not understand the nature of things. They do not know what it means to be a Christian. The day of baptism is important for all those who have been baptized, even those who

are politically committed. We must know how to honor our Christian roots because we have imprinted in our spirit the character of baptism which cannot be eradicated.

Today we conclude the Christmas season which culminated last Sunday with the feast of the Epiphany. The child, born on Christmas, is revealed because he has come not to remain hidden but to make himself known so that all people might come to know him and follow him. No other name but his has been given to people and in his name, in the name of this child who is born in Bethlehem, we are able to be saved. (1) Therefore, he presents himself and comes before people and now we have a mission to bring Jesus everywhere, to be his epiphany, to be his revelation. Today's feast, the baptism of Jesus, is placed within the liturgical framework of the Epiphany. In baptism, as we have seen today, Jesus reveals himself once again. Therefore, this morning I want to present my homily and my reflections on the Word of God that has been proclaimed and apply this message to our concrete life here in El Salvador. The title of my homily is: *Baptism, the revelation of the messianic gifts*. I will develop the following points: First, the baptism of John prepared the birth of the messianic people; Second, the baptism of Jesus revealed his messianic mission; Third, the baptism of Christians is a vital participation in the messianic gifts. And so today we touch upon three concepts of baptism which are often confused and therefore these words should be seen as a catechesis or a pre-sacramental talk that is so necessary today. Indeed, no parish should baptize a child until his/her parents and godparents have been instructed on the great commitment of baptism.

### **The Baptism of John prepared the birth of the messianic people**

First let us focus on John's baptism because in today's reading, while John was baptizing people, Jesus presents himself to be baptized. Here we have the first confusion of many who say: *I will not baptize my child because Jesus was baptized as an adult*. What confusion! We do not administer John's baptism in the Catholic Church.

In order to understand the baptism of John, let us place ourselves in the psychological environment which is presented to us in today's gospel. The people were in a state of expectation and everyone was wondering if John might not be the Messiah. John speaks and says: *I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire* (2). There was a movement that had arisen among the people, a spiritual movement that John began in order to bring all groups of people to the river Jordan and there he baptized them.

Today's gospel shows that the people were in a state of expectation and everyone was asking questions. (3) The psychology of that time is seen in the movement that grew up around John. This was a popular movement that sought an answer, that was looking for something, someone. People were awaiting the one who was to come, the one proclaimed by the prophets. Could this not be John! Listen to his preaching! See how, with humility and austerity, he brings people together! John comes and states: *I am not the Messiah! The Messiah is already here and as the prophet said I am simply preparing people to meet him*. This then is John's message: to prepare people to become the beginning of the messianic people. *The one who will come to establish the messianic people, the one who comes and fulfills the promises made by the prophets, is among you and I, John, am not he. I am simply the precursor. I am preparing his path. My mission is to convert people and I know that my baptism does not give eternal life. My baptism is an external rite that expresses cleansing in the waters of the Jordan, expresses heartfelt repentance. My baptism is above all else an external expression of the one who wishes to be baptized. No one can be baptized unless they change their sinful ways*.

The gospel tells us that people from different social classes approached John and asked: *What should we do?* (4) John told them: *Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do the same.* Tax collectors asked: *what should we do?* Again John responded: *Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.* The gospel tells us some soldiers approached John and he told them: *Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone and be satisfied with your wages.*

Thus John, with the integrity of a man who proposes the ways of God and in the name of the Law of God, spoke to each person what had to be said, and that included the King. He told King Herod: *It is not lawful for you to sleep with your brother's wife. That is sinful* (5). This will cost him his life because there is no wilder beast than a wounded woman who is in love. Herod's woman, the adulteress woman of Herod, takes advantage of Herod's delight in her daughter's dancing and asks that John be beheaded. John dies but he triumphs because the truth always triumphs. This is John's baptism: to tell the truth, to preach against sin and to call people to repentance. Around John there grew up a school of people who converted, people who looked for the Kingdom of God. This is the true baptism of John. I read a commentary about this that stated: *John led the people toward the moment of the world's salvation. They were prepared to become the messianic, eschatological people of God.* In other words, it could be said that John had prepared the primary matter so that Christ could come and, through his baptism in the Spirit, breathe into this matter the life of God that John could not give. But John prepared the material, he prepared people's conscience. What an honor! We do not do anything different in our process of evangelization because no preacher is able to give God's grace except God. But as preachers we can open the path of conversion.

What an honor for me, my beloved sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience, because you do not listen to me out of curiosity but rather you listen to me as the people listened to John the Baptist: *what must we do to find the Kingdom of God.* I know and I give thanks to the Lord for so many people who have converted because they sincerely seek that which the Word of God has to tell them: they say NO to sin and YES to virtue. I do not want to do anything else. If from this pulpit we have to denounce abuse, sin and injustice, it is because we want to continue to fulfill the mission of John: prepare people so that they may receive Christ and so that they may become members of the messianic people.

The Vatican Council defines this spirit in a beautiful way. You can see that John's preaching has a tremendous impact even now, in our time, and it could be said that the Second Vatican Council gathers up the doctrine of John the Baptist in order to prepare people for an encounter with Christ ... to prepare the people who in 1980, like those who looked for Christ on the shore of the Jordan, continue to be people in need of Christ. The Council states: *At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whomsoever fears him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges him in truth and serves him in holiness* (6)\*

When Pope Pius XI established the feast of Christ the King in 1925, he wrote a marvelous encyclical, *Quas Primas* (7), in which he described the Kingdom of God as John described it. The Pope said: *When the populace thronged around him in admiration and would have acclaimed him King, he shrank from the honor and sought safety in flight. Before the Roman magistrate he declared that his kingdom was not of this world. The gospels present this kingdom as one which men prepare to enter by penance, and cannot actually enter except by faith and by baptism, which, though an external rite, signifies and produces an interior regeneration. This kingdom is opposed to*

*none other than to that of Satan and to the power of darkness. It demands of its subjects a spirit of detachment from riches and earthly things, and a spirit of gentleness. They must hunger and thirst after justice, and more than this, they must deny themselves and carry the cross.* My brothers and sisters, you all become the Kingdom of God because Jesus told Christians: *the kingdom of God is within you* (8).

How different it is to be simply a Salvadorian, a member of the people of El Salvador and then to be a member of the People of God. This reality is demanding in regard to virtue, renunciation, and holiness. We can say that in El Salvador all who are members of the People of God are Salvadorians but not all Salvadorians are members of the People of God. Let us keep this in mind because John the Baptist was a citizen of Palestine but not all the people of Palestine converted and not all were preparing to receive Christ. Those first fruits that Jesus was able to find when he began to preach, those people became the new People of God and they were people of Palestine and Christians, whole-heartedly converted.

How beautiful is the scene that Saint John describes in the first chapter of his gospel. John is surrounded by his followers and as Jesus passes by, John the Baptist points him out with the words: *Behold, the Lamb of God* (9). When the disciples heard this they followed him. Jesus turned around when he saw that they were following him and he asks: *What are you looking for?* They responded: *Teacher, where are you staying?* Jesus told them: *Come and you will see.* They went and saw where he was staying. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and they remained with him the rest of the day. Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, was one of the two. Andrew went to look for his brother, Simon, and told him: *we have found the Messiah* and then he brought Simon to meet Jesus. I have read you this passage because there you are able to see how John, in his preaching about conversion, prepared the way for Jesus to initiate his Kingdom. These first disciples of Jesus, John, Andrew and Simon, were from the school of John the Baptist. Undoubtedly the first Christian communities were composed of those followers of John who had heard his preaching about repentance. For this reason I told you that my first thought deals with the idea that John the Baptist prepared the birth of the messianic people through his baptism. John did not create the People of God but prepared them in such a way that Jesus was able to establish his kingdom with those people who had changed their way of life.

### **The Baptism of Jesus, revelation of his messianic mission**

My second point. Jesus draws near in order to be baptized among sinners who are going to the river Jordan. This was a problem for the first Christian communities: how to explain Jesus' baptism if he was not a sinner. If you read the gospels, you will see that the problem of Jesus' baptism is not highlighted in any way. Today, in Saint Luke's gospel, Jesus' baptism appears to be mentioned in an almost indirect way: *after all the people had been baptized and Jesus had also been baptized* (10). Then Jesus is seen at prayer and it can appear that this problem that Luke did not know how to resolve is simply passed over. Nevertheless, theology gives us a wonderful solution. Jesus did not have to be baptized ... his baptism was not the reception of something in the manner that we receive baptism. His baptism is not an expression of repentance in order to receive forgiveness. He did not need forgiveness. He is the saint par excellence.

So what was his baptism? Why today, the second Sunday of Epiphany, are we celebrating the feast of Jesus' baptism and what are we celebrating? His baptism was more than a penitential act; it is a glorious epiphany, a revelation, a manifestation.

The revelation at Jesus' baptism is summed up in the words that were read today. The gospel of

Saint Luke states: *as Jesus was praying heaven was opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. A voice came from heaven (11)*. Then we have the revelation: *You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased*. Jesus was baptized not to become the Son of God but to reveal himself as the Son of God. Jesus was not baptized because of some need of his but because of our need and so he presents himself and reveals himself as the Son of God.

For this reason I have said that there is a certain ignorance communicated in the statement: *I will baptize my child when he/she is Jesus' age*. If your child is not a child of God, then your child is a child of the flesh and needs to become a child of God as soon as possible. On the other hand, Jesus, from the moment of his conception in the womb of Mary is the Son of God and does not need to be baptized. Yes, he went to the river Jordan, but he went there to reveal who he was and to communicate to people the messianic gifts: *In me is fulfilled all that had been announced by the prophets*. The baptism of Jesus is a baptism of revelation. We find a commentary on today's three readings in the following brief revelation: *You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased (12)*.

In the same gospel we find the testimony of John. When people confused him with Christ, he said: *No, I am baptizing you with water ... he will baptize you with the holy Spirit. The only one who can give the gift of God is God and he is God. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. I am not worthy to be his slave (13)*.

Jesus will sign all those who allow themselves to be baptized with the fire of judgment. He will mark people with the sign of eternal life which will be bestowed upon people at the time of judgment ... this is the meaning of being baptized with fire. In the Bible *fire* is not only an expression that means purification but can also refer to God's judgment. Thus fire distinguishes between that which will be burned and that which will not be burned. That which will not be burned will remain. For the human person fire represents one's conscience, that which seeks, that which is lasting and permanent and, therefore, something that is not transitory or of this world.

That which Jesus confers is a baptism of fire and this baptism purifies people and gives them the integrity to be able to withstand the judgment of God.

Jesus will also baptize with the Holy Spirit because the Spirit that anointed him, making him the Son of God in the womb of blessed Mary, is the same Spirit that will sanctify the child that is presented for baptism. The Christian child who lives in fidelity to the baptismal commitment bears the breath of the Holy Spirit, the breath of truth. Christians who allow themselves to be guided by their baptism, become holy people, heroes. There are no more courageous people among the citizens of a nation than those baptized citizens who are faithful to their baptism.\*

Such are the Christians of El Salvador that we desire and it is for this reason that we preach as we do because we want to shake people from their routine that threatens to make them practically baptized pagans, idolaters of their money and power. What kind of baptized persons are these? Those who want to bear the mark of the Spirit and the fire, which results from their sharing in Christ baptism, must take the risk of renouncing everything and seeking only God's kingdom and his justice.\* Salvadorans marked by Christ's baptism, which is Spirit and fire, must be Salvadorans of eternal hope; they cannot yield to pessimism. Neither must they let an earthly political program exhaust their ideals of eternal glory and triumph. The great hope of baptized Salvadorans must stand above all the desperate plans of earth's political leaders.\*

Therefore we wish to conclude here by saying that all those people of El Salvador who have been baptized and who are involved in politics at this critical moment in the history of el Salvador

have to look at the expanse of the Kingdom of God. They should not fantasize in small groups or political parties. They do not have to fantasize but rather should look at the whole political panorama from the perspective of the common good of our people and in this way they will heal the divisions in their organizations and be able to present unified plans. They must be citizens who from the perspective of Christian hope understand others who have different political plans and everyone together must seek the Kingdom of God so that it becomes a reality here in El Salvador.\*

In today's readings we also have the testimony of Peter who comments on the revelation and manifestation of baptism: *You are my Son*. In today's reading Peter says: *Jesus Christ is the Lord of all* (14). Peter also says: *God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power* (15). He then adds: *God was with him and he was God*.

But above all, my sisters and brothers, I want us to focus on the testimony presented in today's first reading. The wonderful prophesy of Isaiah is the best commentary on God's revelation which occurs in the person of Jesus on the shores of the river Jordan. God says: *You are my Son*. The prophet Isaiah said: *Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my spirit* (16). Then when Jesus is baptized we find reference to the words of Isaiah: *Upon whom I have put my spirit* (17). This is the anointing that makes Jesus the Anointed One and *the anointed one* is the same as Christ or the Messiah. *Messiah* is a word of eastern origins which means the same as the Greek word *Christ* and the Spanish word *unigido*. All have the same meaning: Messiah, Christ, the Anointed One. The Holy Spirit anoints Jesus, that is, the Holy Spirit enters into his life and elevates him to that which is divine.

Thus the first reading presents the servant of God as one who is strong ... so strong that he will establish justice among the nations. (18) He will promote justice and will, with his laws, establish justice throughout the world and be the hope of the people who live in the most remote areas of the world. Look at the great comfort that God, in Christians, brings forth with his power! The task of his Kingdom is to establish truth and justice and true love among all people. There is no reason to despair when we can rely on the servant of God who is so powerful that he is able to transform all societies in which people dedicate themselves to being his true collaborators. This collaboration, however, has to be in the style of the Lord.

My sisters and brothers, I would like to focus on today's readings and especially on the characteristics of the Christ figure: *Not crying out, not shouting, not making his voice heard on the streets* (19). How different from the demagogic shouting that at this time is so often heard in our midst! Therefore I ask politicians who speak with microphones not to make the error that I make: to shout so loud when standing before a microphone. If there is any purpose to this invention it is to preserve our throats and voices. When we hear people shouting like demagogues into a microphone we often ask: *Why does this person need a microphone?* Hopefully we might have the calmness of the Christ figure when we speak: *Do not cry out! Do not shout! Do not make your voice be heard on the street*. There is a saying: *do not raise your voice, strengthen your reasoning*. Many times we shout because our reasoning is not clear. During these days, as I listen to certain political discourses, I find no constructive reasoning in them ... much shouting, many words, but no expression of their plans or ideas to attain the common good of the nation. We ought to be like the voice of the Christ figure whom Isaiah spoke about when he said: *Do not shout!*

Then Isaiah refers to the attitude of the Christ figure. How beautiful: *a bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench* (20). We are impatient. If we break a reed we throw it out. If the fire on a piece of charcoal goes out, we become angry and throw it out. The Christ figure does not quench a wick, even if it is smoldering. There is still a spark of hope,

something can still be done. Therefore, let us not say that all the doors are closed when we know that there are people who are able to reason.

Let us imitate Christ who came precisely to redeem us, the broken reed. What if Christ had acted like us and become impatient in the same way that we become impatient with others. Look at how throughout history Christ had to bear with so many things and still we have not amended our lives. He continues to wait and wait because perhaps at the last moment the prodigal son will return and embrace his father with the same kindness as the older son who was always faithful and remained in his father's house. (21) This is how God loves and it is also how we ought to love. At this time when we may want to throw everything out, leave the country, abandon everything, remember the words that describe the attitude of the Christ figure: *a broken reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not quench*. Let us still hold on, let us harden ourselves.

My sisters and brothers, we are not going to resolve this national crisis and establish some heavenly paradise. Never! A remedy will be found. Yes, everything that happens in history is a remedy for sinful humanity! There is only one absolute renewal and that occurs in eternity. The new heaven and the new earth (22) will bring about true transformation. While we travel through history we will have to act like the Christ figure: repair the broken reed and blow on the smoldering wick. We do not want to establish a paradise on earth because that is impossible to do.

This is the Christ figure who is presented to us today at this time of epiphany. His strength is borne with gentleness and kindness and he can be sure of God's care and watchfulness: *I, the Lord, have called you for the victory of justice; I grasped you by the hand. I have formed you as a covenant of the people, a light to the nations* (23). How could we not feel secure while walking with Christ? God has grasped our hand and we, through baptism, have become one with him. The Christ figure is the true leader of liberation. This idea is presented to us in the first reading: *I have formed you as a covenant people, a light for the nations. To open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from the dungeon those who live in darkness* (24). These are words that we can understand, words that translated into language, into modern language, are able to be understood by all of us: the oppressed! Christ came for the oppressed of every land. All those who want to free people from oppression cannot find a greater liberator than Christ, the only liberator.\*

Christ is baptized not out of necessity but places his messianic gifts in the waters of baptism: riches that flow from the power of his cross and resurrection. Because Jesus is God he comes to accomplish those tasks which have just been explained: to establish justice, to redeem and save the world with the tenderness of a redeemer. Therefore, he suffered the most frightening humiliation and died on the cross. But he was also given a glory that no one else had received: he was raised to new life and is now seated at the right hand of the Father. His humiliating death and his glorious resurrection are the source of our hope. Those who are baptized are signed with his death and resurrection.

### **The baptism of Christians is a vital participation in the messianic gifts**

I end with my third point: our baptism, as Christians, is a vital sharing in the messianic gifts. What an honour to think all of you in front of me are Christ! The most humble peasant, listening perhaps to his radio, is Christ because baptism identifies us with Christ's death and resurrection. See how our baptism is not that which people who repented of their sins received from John the Baptist nor is it the baptism that Jesus received since he had no need to be baptized but received

baptism in order to reveal who he was. Our baptism is a baptism of sin. We are children of sin and so we approach the baptismal font of forgiveness and then all the gifts of Christ become ours.

The second reading is an account of the first gentile who was baptized. A man named Cornelius prayed in his own way and God revealed to him that he should send for Peter who had a message to communicate to him. At first Peter was afraid because Jews were not allowed to mingle with gentiles. Peter is Jewish and Cornelius is a Roman, a gentile. Nevertheless, because the Spirit had commanded Peter, he enters and speaks with Cornelius. In chapter ten of the book of the Acts of the Apostles we have the discourse which Peter spoke to the family of Cornelius and today's reading is just a fragment of that discourse. Peter says: *I see that God makes no division between Jew and Gentile! I see that God wants to make all people participants in his gifts.* He then speaks to them about Jesus Christ. If you want to know how the Apostles preached and if you want to see if we preach as the Apostles did, then reflect on the discourses which are found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. In chapter ten you will find the entire discourse that Peter spoke to the centurion, Cornelius. He spoke about the Christian religion and what we must believe about Christ, the Son of God, who came among us, died and rose. We see in Peter's words a catechetical lesson, a lesson on baptism. The Scriptures tell us: *While Peter was still speaking these things, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who were listening to the word. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, for they could hear them speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Then Peter responded: "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit even as we have?"* (25). Then Peter baptized them.

Baptism is the coming of the Holy Spirit which is poured out on people after they have accepted in faith the redemption and salvation that is proclaimed. This is an outline of the work of evangelization: proclaim the Kingdom of Christ. Those who accept this proclamation and manifest their acceptance are then baptized. In Baptism we receive the Holy Spirit. All the messianic richness that Christ exhibited in the river Jordan is communicated to the child who is baptized. For this reason I told you that the baptismal font is like a cradle from which arises the Kingdom of God, a new person. The effect of Baptism is mentioned in today's readings: *the Spirit of God came upon them.*(26) In other words, the Spirit that encouraged Jesus in holiness and redemption, and all that was spoken about by the prophet Isaiah, this same Spirit will act in the same way toward us. My sisters and brothers, we are all baptized people, a prophetic people, a priestly people, we are Christ. Let us honor this participation that has been given to us at the time of our baptism.

As I develop this third point that deals with the baptism of Christians, I want to focus on two marvelous persons who are presented to us in today's readings. The first person is the Servant of Yahweh, very unlike the typical person that appears in the book of Isaiah. The Servant of Yahweh is the servant of God. He is a mysterious person and some commentators have identified him with Christ, but Christ not as an individual but the community of Christ, the community of believers. The Servant of Yahweh is Christ and the Christian community is the Christian people. When we read this passage from this perspective we discover that the servant of Yahweh enlightens us about the meaning of the book of Isaiah. When the Servant suffers we can see there the Christians of El Salvador. Christ suffers with Christians who are persecuted and who live in difficult situations. The Servant of Yahweh is happy and joyful when he receives the revelation of God and we will also be happy when we have the pleasure of joining him in heaven. There we will be with him as one single servant of Yahweh, one redeemed people. Christ the head and all of us members of the glorious Christ. What an honor and what a sublime destiny for those who have been baptized and incorporated into Christ! Do not separate yourselves from him for all eternity because he has desired to save us from sin.



The other wonderful person who is presented to us in today's reading is the dove that came down and rested upon Jesus. Usually this is interpreted as a symbol of the Holy Spirit and so I hope you will not be scandalized by what I am going to say: in no part of the Bible do we find the Holy Spirit represented by a dove. Rather, the better interpretation of the dove is to see this as a symbol of the community. We find this expressed in the writings of the first Fathers of the Church who analyzed some biblical phrases (27) that compared the People of God, the community, to a turtledove in the hands of God. (28) Therefore it appears that at the time of Jesus' baptism the dove symbolizes all the people who are going to share in the title, Son of God. We are all like different adornments of Christ, our Lord. We are his people. We are truly what Saint Paul calls "the pleroma"<sup>1</sup>, the complement, those who are watched over and clothed in Christ, our Lord. In this sense this interpretation tells us that baptism incorporates us into Christ and makes us the community of Christ. Therefore the life of Christ circulates through us. All of the beautiful comparisons of the Church, for example, the mystical body of Christ, signify that the life of Christ circulates through us. Through baptism the messianic gifts of the Lord become ours.

Let us call to mind the action of the priest at the baptismal font. With his fingers the priest anoints the head of the person to be baptized with the chrism oil and thus we are told that at that moment we become members of the People of Christ: a royal, prophetic and priestly people. We participate in the priestly, royal and prophetic dignity of Christ. On the day of Confirmation, those who have been baptized and who are aware of what they are doing, present themselves to the bishop who again marks them with the sign of Christ so that they become conscious collaborators with Christ, redeemer, prophet, priest and king. This is what we, the people of El Salvador are. Wherever there are Christians, there is the People of God who cannot be easily distinguished from people in general, but within these people there are realities and hopes that are not present in non-believers or in those who have been baptized but live their commitment in such a lifeless, deadening and tepid manner that it would appear that they are nothing but baptized pagans.

### **Life of the Church**

My dear sisters and brothers, this is the Church that we want to build and so as I begin to speak to you at this time about the life of our Church I ask you not to lose sight of this theological-evangelical perspective. What we attempt to do in our communities is awaken people to the fact that we are a community in Christ.

I want to give priority this morning to the testimony of Sister Beatriz who ministers in Arcatao and who, because of her work on behalf of the Kingdom of God, has suffered much. She is going to speak to you personally.

*Yesterday, in the area of Arcatao, a soldier, José Elías Quintanilla<sup>2</sup>, was captured. Afterward the Sisters themselves were captured and threatened with death if the soldier mentioned above did not appear. Finally, there was calmness and we were sent to ask the Bishop to plead for the release of the soldier, José Elías Quintanilla. Since there was not sufficient time to speak about all of this with the Bishop, I come before you to express the following: we ask those who have captured the aforesaid soldier to grant him freedom. We trust that the people who have captured him will be guided by Christian principles and will reflect before they act and will consent to this petition. If unfortunately, however, something irreparable has occurred, we ask the members of the Guardia not to seek vengeance but to think first of all about the pain and suffering that is experienced in so many homes in El Salvador. Many campesinos have lost their lives and so we ask you again not to act with vengeance. Do not commit further abuses in the area of Arcatao because these are poor*

*people. We trust that those who have captured the soldier from Arcatao (we know that the military is responsible for this since they are seeking his freedom but most probably some civilians have committed this crime, even though their identity has not been confirmed) will release him. This is the call that we make. We also want to tell the Guardia in Arcatao that the Sisters do not need to be pressured or threatened with death in order to fulfill our Christian mission, namely, to intercede for the life of any human person.\**

I thank Sister Beatriz and hopefully this conflictive situation that has been created there in Arcatao as a result of the capture of José Elías Quintanilla is resolved favorably. I reaffirm the petition that was made by Sister and also pray that those who have captured this soldier will not become a spark that creates a fire and also pray that the Guardia will not react with vengeance which could result in the loss of the lives of many innocent people. On our part, we join with the Sisters in forgiving this outbreak of anger which without a doubt caused him to be held as prisoners. I want to congratulate the Sisters because, like the Apostles, they are able to say: *we rejoice to have suffered in the name of Jesus* (30).

Thursday at midnight, the front of the parish church, Corazón de María, was shot up. We do not know who did this nor do we know what the purpose of this action was. A simple explanation might be: *the devil is running around and attacking the image of God on earth, his churches.*

The pastor of San José Ojo de Agua, in the area of Chalatenango, Father Héctor Figueroa wrote me a very pastoral letter. It is a lengthy letter and therefore I am not going to read it here but I want to express to this pastor my gratitude for his work and I understand his suffering as pastor that has resulted from being in the midst of people who are divided and have sown much hatred that has caused division. May the Lord have compassion on our people and may we all collaborate in sowing love rather than vengeance and division.

In the community of Santiago Aculhuaca we celebrated a beautiful ceremony of Confirmation for young women and men and also had a gathering of the pastoral ministers of the parish.

In the community of Rosario de Mora, the Oblate Sisters of Divine Love prepared a very significant liturgy during which we celebrated First Communion.

Today in San Pedro Perulapán there is a gathering of the pastoral ministers and I hope to visit them this afternoon.

In Guazapa the faithful are asked to help in completing the construction work of the church and also to continue to build community there.

I was informed in a very beautiful letter about the inauguration of a health clinic in Colonial Santa Margarita in Cuscatancingo.

In the village of San José Cortez in Ciudad Delgado the catechists are asking for further assistance so that the church can be opened and thus enable them to work on behalf of the community.

During these days at 7:00pm, the community of San Francisco Mejicanos is going to celebrate the first anniversary of the death of Father Octavio Ortiz. Next Sunday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, we will celebrate the anniversary of his painful assassination in El Despertar in San Antonio de Abad with a Mass. There in the church of San Francisco Mejicanos and at the tomb of Father Octavio we will

celebrate the Eucharist at 11:00am. I spoke to a reporter and said that the celebration would take place this Sunday but I was corrected. This will take place next Sunday at 11:00am in San Francisco Mejicanos.

On January 15<sup>th</sup> at 9:00am the people of Aguilares will celebrate their patronal feast in honor of the Lord of Mercy. Also on January 15<sup>th</sup> we will celebrate the famous feast of Christ of Esquipulas. In our Diocese we have two sanctuaries where many people will gather together. We hope that this popular devotion will lead people to join in pilgrimage to the churches in San Bartolomé Perulapía and Colón.

Personally speaking, I am most grateful for the beautiful letter from the employees of Cine Mexico. From their poverty they sent economic assistance and said: *Receive our greetings and may God always enlighten you so that you may continue in your ministry and love and your struggle on behalf of the people of El Salvador. We send you this small contribution and ask you to use it in the way that you see best.* I thank you for your kind gesture.\*

*Orientación* was most kind in publishing last Sunday's homily in its entirety.<sup>3</sup> I thank those people who have analyzed this homily and given me suggestions. This edition of our newspaper is now on sale.

We have a new director of our radio station YSAX, Napoleón Navarro. I thank him for his collaboration and trust that his fidelity to the Church will enable him to guide this voice of ours in a way that gives true meaning to the pastoral work of the Archdiocese.

I ask your prayers for David Agustín who would have celebrated his birthday on January 11<sup>th</sup>. I forgot to mention his name last Sunday. I say he would have celebrated his birthday because we do not know if he is still living because he is one of those persons who disappeared on March 11, 1977. Whether he is alive or dead we pray for him and for all of those who have disappeared.

### **Events of the week**

My sisters and brothers, as a Church that attempts to build on its baptism and its faithfulness to its baptismal commitment, as a priestly, prophetic and royal people, we must become aware of the reality in which we live our faith because our faith gives us criteria which we can use in order to view the political realities that surround us. The ecclesial base communities and the bishop have to live the reality in union with one another because as ecclesial communities we are not competent to make concrete options.

The actual reality presents us with three options: that of the government, that of the oligarchy, and that of the popular organizations. Each person is free to choose the option that they want. But as Church, if we have to point out any option, then the criteria of the gospel must guide our option that should lead us to work on behalf of the good of the people. No option should be chosen for personal advantage or for the advantage of some group. Even less should options be selected in order to maintain selfish interests that continue to trample upon the people. Rather from this platform of the Christian community, the Pastor and the Christian communities have an obligation to act impartially and be a Christian conscience in the midst of our people in order to guide people so that they might reflect the Kingdom of God here on earth.

With regard to the option of the government: This past week the Government Junta has been restored<sup>4</sup> and there has been talk about the names of some persons who will form the next Cabinet

and we hope that this will be resolved during the coming week. The Armed Forces have stated that *the Christian Democratic Party has accepted this role after the Armed Forces publicly committed themselves to foster the path of change and democracy and to develop a popular plan that is anti-oligarchy.*<sup>5</sup> The Armed Forces (according to their words) consider this an historical alternative for El Salvador and are dedicated to return to the reforms that were previously proposed and doing this with enthusiasm and the sacrifices that might be necessary<sup>6</sup>. Specifically, and in accord with the conditions that were presented, they propose certain lines of action in the economic, political, social and military areas. I am not going to read those here because all of you know the lines of action of the governmental plan that was agreed to by the Christian Democratic Party and the Armed Forces.

In a practical order I see in all of this that they have accepted the conditions that the Ministers of the previous Cabinet placed before them if they were to continue in their roles. What surprises me is why all these conditions have been accepted today and accepted with so many details and yet no agreement could be reached with the previous Ministers? Hopefully the acceptance today of that which seemed unacceptable yesterday is a sign of conversion and sincere recognition of an error. When one is humble and recognizes one's error then there is reason to hope that such a conversion will be efficacious.

My other warning in all of this is that I hope these proposals are not merely words or written agreements and statements. What we all desire is concrete action. If it is true that the Armed Forces and the government Junta are willing to confront the oligarchy and redistribute land and income in a just manner, then their actions will speak to us. A lack of action will create a lack of credibility. The great task of the government is to win credibility and this is only gained through action.

One of the ways to obtain this credibility quickly is to create the necessary and adequate conditions in the political arena so that these changes, which motivated the previous crisis, might be effective today. For this to happen, the repression must cease and we must be informed about the fate of political prisoners. There must be a thorough investigation of the bloody actions that have been occurring in the rural areas, and those responsible for these actions must be punished and those who have been harmed as a result of these actions must receive some form of indemnification. The Commission<sup>7</sup> charged with these matters stopped their work when the Ministers resigned. In the new agreement between a political party<sup>8</sup> and the Armed Forces there is no mention of those persons who have disappeared. As a Church that defends human rights we continue to insist: the events surrounding those who have disappeared must be explained!\*

Bloodshed continues in the rural areas. You have listened to Sister Beatriz speak about the situation in Chalatenango. I would like the government to give special attention to the area of Chalatenango. What is happening there? I have also found out that three bodies were found in Aguilares. I have also received a note from Cáritas that states that in the village of Los Pajales and the village of El Triunfo, in the jurisdiction of Santa Tecla in the Chilama River, a man appears to have been killed while he was bathing. These are facts that startle us because everywhere we are living in this state of anxiety as a result of continually finding dead bodies.

I was deeply moved by the expression of pain and suffering that was expressed in a letter in which I was informed about some of the details about the child who died as the victim of a gunshot wound in Soyapango. As this child was suffering he said to his mother: *Let us pray mother so that I do not die ... pray to Saint Anthony whom I have here in bed with me.* No one wants to die and that is especially true of a child who is seen as our future. Therefore we call upon everyone to begin to create situations of peace, but peace that is based on true justice.

I hope that the civilians who now take up the work of the government will not allow themselves to be put into situations where they deceive or repress the people. Know that you can rely on the support of the Church in as much as you put in place the changes and reforms that will truly benefit the *campesinos*, workers, those marginalized and those who have been dispossessed from their lands and homes. The Archdiocese experiences a very special solidarity with these people.

In the editorial section of our weekly newspaper *Orientación* we gather together some thoughts that are taken from the document of Puebla and in doing so we hope to encourage the pacific work of our nation. Puebla states (31): *Our responsibility as Christians is to use all possible means to promote the implementation of nonviolent tactics in the effort to re-establish justice in economic and sociopolitical relations. This is in accordance with the teaching of Vatican II which applies to both national and international life: "We cannot fail to praise those who renounce the use of violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defense which are otherwise available to weaker parties too, provided that this can be done without injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community"* (32).

The other option is that of the popular organizations. There are political groups and political parties that have manifested their non-cooperation with the new government. I understand that it is one thing to not cooperate directly with a public statement and no one is obliged to do this but it is very distinct when this non-cooperation is stated and at the same time other people are attempting to support and promote changes that truly benefit people. Yes, we ought to promote the common good of the people. The ideological opposition that might exist should not hinder a project especially if said project favors the people.

On the other hand, during the past week we have seen the first steps taken toward unity among the popular organizations. A national coordinator has come into existence and all the progressive elements of the country have been invited to participate<sup>9</sup>. I am happy that at last they want to break away from their sectarian and party interests and want to seek a broader unity. I will always insist on the following: Do not become fanatical! Not everyone is organized or thinks the same as you. There are political visions that are broader than the concrete political action that some people have taken.

I also want to remind you here not to offend the feelings and sentiments of people as you carry out your political strategies. I was greatly alarmed by seeing a young girl who was handing out leaflets to other children during a demonstration. The leaflets read: *You, you are waiting in vain for your God above to send you your daily bread*. I believe that we do not create a nation in this way. Do not attempt to destroy the religious sentiments of people but rather encourage people to place their religious sentiments at the service of others. This is the religion that we desire and that we have proclaimed on this day when we remember our baptism. We are not asking for bread while remaining passive. Rather we work but we also pray. Without prayer there can be no redemption. I am surprised, for example, why there are so many shouts against imperialism and yet when newspapers and so many other means of communication have announced the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, nothing is said? Abuse is always unjust even when it is done by those who sympathize with our ideals. If we are truly just then we will have to reproach the injustices of our friends.\*

Look at the effect of certain violent reactions. This week I gathered together some data: 8,200 people are unemployed because the sources of their work have been closed due to fire or some other insane action. If we suppose that each one of these persons sustains four or five other family members, then we can see that approximately 40,000 people are now unable to be sustained because

of a lack of work. Let us be mindful of this so that we do not engage in violence that does not lead us in the direction of the liberation of our people.

For example, what is the meaning of occupying the Panamanian embassy and abusing the freedom of the ambassador from Costa Rica who had no role in this matter? I wanted to mediate this matter but my intervention was not accepted. Hopefully others will be more successful and able to resolve these situations.

I believe that this coordination of the political organizations can play a very important and very positive role in our country, especially if they watch over and pressure the Armed Forces and the new government to fulfill their promises. Do not use your power to put obstacles in the path of a plan that benefits people but rather use your power to pressure the government to fulfill their promises on behalf of the common good of our people.

During this chapter of our history and in obedience to the gospel which demands the preaching of love and peace, our Church cannot be in accord with violence as long as there are rational and peaceful resources. Even though I spoke about this during my radio interview on Wednesday, I want to take advantage of this opportunity to speak further about the case of the former Minister of Education<sup>10</sup> and his option to join the clandestine guerrilla group known as the FPL (Popular Liberation Forces). Violence is a regression of civilization and is an expression of the primitive instinct of the human person when one does not want to or is unable to use rational means. Above all, violence is the logical but deplorable consequence of the very structure of sin. Therefore, I want to say three things about this case that I have mentioned.

First, this case and this event has been used as propaganda by the guerrilla organization that wants to enthrone more young people to join them. I have said many times that we must be critical and not like sheep and it is not licit to use propaganda in order to pressure the conscience of others.

Second, the other attitude is that of the oligarchy who want to control the media and ultimately want to reaffirm their own position. In this respect I wish they were more honest in their use of the media and did not use the news to offend and criticize those who work on behalf of social justice and in this way create an atmosphere of confusion\*.

Third, from a Christian point of view I believe two things should be said: first, we respect the personal option that in conscience each person must make. Therefore respect for the individual conscience is primary. Mr. Samayoa has in conscience made a decision and he will give an accounting of his actions to God and so we respect him. But there is another more important reality that as Christians we must speak about and that is: we must condemn the structure of sin in which we live, this decayed system that unfortunately pressures many people to choose radical and violent options. Those who are responsible for this are precisely those persons who maintain these structures of social injustice that make people lose hope of being able to resolve this situation in any other way but by the use of violence.\* They have to consider the fact that if they want to avoid opening these paths toward violence and disorder and secrecy then they have to begin to eliminate the great disorder that resides in their own selfishness and their social injustice.\*

But here I also call upon the human sentiments of the members of these political groups. Such is the case, for example, of the abduction of Mr. Dunn, the ex-ambassador of South Africa. I have been accepted as a mediator in this case and I want to say here: hasten the communication because a wife is dying and a man is deprived of his freedom! If you are truly popular forces who struggle on behalf of that which is good for the people, then here you are trampling upon the dignity of a

man and abusing the pain and suffering of his wife. It is urgent that you resolve this case and situation which involves innocent victims of violence.

Finally, the other political plan, that of the oligarchy. The members of oligarchy are trying to organize and broaden their power in order to defend their interests. Again in the name of our people and our Church, I call out to you to listen to the voice of God and instead of provoking a civil war that will bathe us in a great deal of blood share generously your power and wealth with all people. It is still time to take the rings off your fingers before they cut off your hands.\*

These then are the three options, the three paths on which politicians are seeking the solution for the problems of our nation. The Church does not identify herself with any of these options since this is not within her competency. She supports whatever process benefits the people. It is for this reason that on previous Sundays I said: *Let us save the process!* In other words, let us support the noble aspirations of our people and not betray them! Let us move in the direction of a definitive solution! I believe that the plan that the country needs is one that does not need arms in order to impose its will but rather a plan that will truly unite the people of El Salvador because it objectively represents the interests of the greater majority of people.

It is here that I once again address the humble people who might find themselves on the margins of society: Do not think that I am pushing you to organize with those groups that already exist. I want you to understand me: I am not saying this. I want to tell you that we are all protagonists of the future and therefore we must objectively analyze events and not allow ourselves to be carried away by emotions or euphoria or anxiety. We must be critical and employ mature and human attitudes. Let us create in ourselves the identity that is so necessary for Christians, an identity that is the fruit of baptism and that commits us with Christ, an identity that because we were born in this country, commits us to this country. Let us know how to integrate faith and politics through a process of critical thinking that will reveal our true personality. That is what I have wanted to tell you today as I have spoken about baptism which does not alienate us from the national reality but gives us new criteria and new abilities. We attempt to know the identity of our religion. Who are we as baptized persons? In this way we will know how to respond, namely, we are Christians. Yes, we have a political vocation, but how do we develop this political vocation without betraying our Christian identity? There are many people, especially young people, who are involved in the actual political processes of the nation. I rejoice in their political and social sensitivity and this is a gift for which we must give thanks to God. At the same time we must know how to channel this vocation and here in the liturgy of today we find the channel. May all the people of El Salvador honor not only their concrete, political commitment but may they also honor their Christian commitment so that from the perspective of the saving power of the Christ they may truly be a life-giving element in the salvation of their own country. So be it.\* I hope you will allow an appeal an ecumenical group wishes to make for this week.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A Greek word meaning "fullness".

<sup>2</sup> His name is José Elías Torres Quintanilla.

<sup>3</sup> See *Orientación*, 13 January 1980.

<sup>4</sup> On 9 January new civilian members joined the Junta Revolucionaria de Gobierno: Héctor Dada Hirezi, José Antonio Morales Erlich of the Partido Demócrata Cristiano, and José Ramón Avalos, an independent. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 10 January 1980.

<sup>5</sup> "La Fuerza Armada al pueblo salvadoreño" (9 January 1980), *La Prensa Gráfica*, 10 January 1980.

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

<sup>7</sup> Comisión Especial Investigadora de los Reos y Desaparecidos Políticos.

<sup>8</sup> The Partido Demócrata Cristiano

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<sup>9</sup> On 11 January, the UDN, the BPR, FAPU and the LP-28 set up the Comité Coordinador para el Movimiento de Unidad Popular which led to the Coordinadora Revolucionaria de Masas. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 12 January 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Salvador Samayoa. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 9 January 1980.

<sup>11</sup> Mons Romero handed the microphone to a representative of the ecumenical committee inviting participation in the Week of Prayer for the Unity of Christians, from January 18 to 25 1980.

*Marginal References* (1) Ac 4,12; (2) Jn 3,15-16; (3) Lk 3,15a; (4) Lk 3,10-14; (5) Mk 6,18; (6) LG 9; (7) QP 14; (8) Lk 17,21; (9) Jn 1,35-42a; (10) Lk 3,21; (11) Lk 3,21b-22; (12) Lk 3,22b; (13) Lk 3,16; (14) Ac 10,36; (15) Ac 10,38; (16) Is 42,1a; (17) Is 42,1b; (18) Is 42,4; (19) Is 42,2; (20) Is 42,3; (21) Lk 15,11-32; (22) 2P 3,13; (23) Is 42,6; (24) Is 42,7; (25) Ac 10,44-48; (26) Ac 10,44; (27) Ps 74,19; (28) Os 11,11; (29) Col 2,10; (30) Ac 5,41.