

TRANSCENDENCE AND ETERNITY

Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time
July 31, 1977

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23

Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11

Luke 12:13-21

My dear radio audience.

This Sunday, which according to the liturgical calendar is the Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time, I am unable to celebrate the Eucharist with you. I previously told you that I have to travel to Costa Rica to participate in a meeting of the bishops from Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean. Thanks to technological advances, however, I have been able to record this message, so that I can be with you during the time of your reflection on the Scripture Readings that are proclaimed this Sunday.

The life of our Church

As I begin this reflection on the Word of God that we have just listened to, I am very mindful of this Archdiocese gathered together in prayer to nourish itself as a community. Above all, I want to greet all those listening to the radio and invite you to prepare yourselves spiritually for the celebration of our patron feast which will take place on August 6th, the feast of the Divine Savior of the world. I want to speak some kind words to the community of Citalá where the people live and are nourished by the Divine Word. This town is located on our frontier with Honduras. Last Monday I had the privilege of celebrating the Eucharist with the Sisters and the people of this very devout community. I want to thank you for the very warm reception that you gave me --- a reception that is a sign of the way you receive the Word of God. I became aware of the very generous trait of these people and I want to place their example before all the communities so that others might imitate their initiative. This community has no resident priest. Yet each Sunday, the people gather in the Church and at the time that we are celebrating the Eucharist in the cathedral, they are listening together to this celebration on the radio. At the time of Communion, the Sisters distribute the Eucharist and conclude with their own prayers. In this way, the Word of God and the homily that we proclaim in the cathedral are transmitted to the people of this community who devoutly embrace it. In fact, they receive this message in the same way as the congregation in the Cathedral receives this Word. I want to thank you for this original initiative and I hope that other towns and villages, where there are no resident priests, will follow your example and nourish themselves with this spiritual reflection on the Word of God.

When we returned from Citalá with the beloved pastor of La Palma, Father Vito Guarato, we visited the parish center in La Palma. We saw the devotion of this people that nourishes the spiritual life of the parishioners. Here we became aware of a very original way in which their spiritual life is translated into concrete actions in their daily life. Under the direction of Mr. Fernando Llort and his team of collaborators, workshops called *La Semilla de Dios* (the Seed of God) are conducted on a regular basis. These workshops enable the

participants to develop different crafts and manual arts, as well as help women and men to grow in the Spirit through reflection and prayer. May the Lord continue to bless this work that has been initiated by the Holy Spirit and may the community of La Palma continue to grow. This visit nourished my spirit as pastor and allowed me to see what is possible for a community when they understand the significance of the Incarnation of the Word of God in their everyday life. It would be wonderful if every conflict, be it sociological, economical or political, were able to be resolved in the same way that they are dealt with in La Palma --- with great love, a great sense of work, and a spirit of prayer.

At this time we also want to thank all those who are charged with preparing different aspects of our celebration on August 6th. A very active committee of priests and lay people has taken charge of preparing this very complicated celebration. We say complicated because we want to make this a splendid celebration in order that the Divine Savior of the world receives the homage of the Archdiocese and the country and then, in turn we pray that the Divine Savior will abundantly bless us. The program for these days has already been published and those in charge of overseeing the detailed work involved in this celebration are involved in an intense work. Yet they tend to these details with great love for our Divine Redeemer.

We have announced that on the morning of August 5th, there will be a gathering of the Prayer Apostolate in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We have invited all Catholics to participate in the traditional procession that will take place at 4:00pm. This event will be broadcast on radio and those who are unable to assist can listen to the transmission of this solemn activity on Radio YSAX. I also urge those who will participate in the procession to lend your radios to those who might not have a radio and are unable to come to the Basilica for the procession.

In the evening of August 5th, we invite everyone who desires to pray for the nation to come to the cathedral. There, together with prayer groups from the communities and from the Charismatic Movement and under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will offer prayers for our country and our Church. The following day, August 6th, at 9:00am we hope that all the parishes will gather together under their banners in the plaza in front of the cathedral. There, in a solemn celebration, we will offer homage to our patron, the Divine Savior of the world.

We have spoken about the spiritual objectives of this celebration. We beg all the people of El Salvador to not allow themselves to be led astray by ill-intentioned individuals. There is no reason to attribute evil intentions to our actions, for we, as Church, simply desire to honor the Divine Savior of the world. We ask God to bless this beloved land that has been given the beautiful patron of the Divine Savior.

At the same time that we remind you about these events that surround the celebration of our patronal feast, we are also mindful of many realities that form part of our every day life. We think about our fields that need rain, our hopes for a plentiful harvest, the beauty of our countryside and the current situation of our country. If only we could reflect on the profound significance of all these realities. Today's readings invite us to view all these realities in their proper perspective. I want to highlight here today the message of transcendence and invite you, my radio audience, to reflect on this message.

Transcendence and the autonomy of the temporal

Transcendence is a word that implies orienting reality toward that which is eternal and divine, toward God. The world and the created richness of this world find their true meaning when they are seen from the perspective of God who is the source of their origin. Without this perspective, all things are vanity. The Council says: *Without the Creator, the creature would disappear*. I am going to read you the whole paragraph from the Council which seems to me the best commentary on today's readings. It comes in the Decree on the Church in today's world, in number 36, and reads as follows:

Now, many of our contemporaries seem to fear that a closer bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences.

If by autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws, and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore, if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith. For earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed, whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind, is, even unawares, being led by the hand of God, who holds all things in existence, and gives them their identity. Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, sometimes found too among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science. The arguments and controversies which they spark lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed.

But if the expression, "the independence of temporal affairs", is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God, and that man can use them without reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion have always heard His revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible (a).

This passage from *the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* is the most authoritative commentary on today's scripture readings. When the Old Testament says: *Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!* (b), we are being presented a view of reality apart from the Creator. All is vanity. Created things have no meaning in themselves, but have an autonomy, as stated in the document cited above, because God has given them a meaning, that is, their reason for existence, their beauty and their value is rooted in God. Therefore in this sense the things of the world recover their beauty when they are viewed from this perspective of transcendence and when they are oriented toward God. Then they are no longer vanity, but have their proper beauty because the source of this beauty, God, has been acknowledged.

The Church's mission is to give things their transcendent meaning.

From this same perspective, let us reflect on and analyze the Gospel for this Sunday. When the man in the crowd cries out and asks Jesus to help him in forcing his brother to share his inheritance, Jesus says that he has not been appointed as a judge over temporal

affairs. Jesus is telling the man to look at the origin of these things because these earthly goods are not the source of his happiness. Having things does not make a person happy. But having things and seeking God and God's will concerning the use of these things --- there one finds happiness. Jesus is telling this man: *Be careful of the many different forms of covetousness, for even though you have many things stored up for yourself, your life does not depend on all these earthly things* (c).

This is a warning about the use of earthly goods that have been created by God. The Church, like Christ, is not here as a judge or an arbitrator in the matter of temporal goods. The Council has stated very clearly that the mission of the Church is not social or political or economical but rather religious (d). Thus the mission of the Church is to give a religious, transcendent dimension to politics and to all earthly things. The Church is intimately connected to the things of this world because she knows how to unite them to the will of the Creator. When these realities, created by the human person, are dominated by sin, then the Church must raise her voice and denounce them. For God does not want things to be used in this way, that is, with an attitude of covetousness, selfishness, the possession of goods by only a few --- this is not God's will. Indeed, the will of God, who created the things of this world for the happiness and good of all persons, demands that we, as a Church, give these things a meaning of transcendence, their true meaning according to God's will.

What happens when people lose this vision of transcendence is described very beautifully in today's Gospel. The rich man in the Gospel found his happiness in a great harvest, in filling his barns, and rejoicing in a life of leisure. He forgot about death and God. The Gospel reminds him: *you fool, this night your life will be demanded of you, and all the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?* (e). This is the vanity that is spoken about in the first reading: what profit does a person obtain for so much work and for acquiring so many possessions --- they all must be left behind. One is unable to bring material possessions into the after-life, but one must give an account for the way in which these material goods were used --- were they used according to God's will? The internal attitudes of people will accompany them to the eternal judgment: have these material goods been used and given a meaning of transcendence, have they been seen from the perspective of God?

This then is the mission of the Church in the world: to demand that people look at material goods and their own attitudes with this perspective of transcendence. Political, economical and social matters, all the affairs of the earth, all temporal obligations, human rights, everything belonging to the earth --- all of these are of great interest to the Church. They are of interest to her not because they are the object of her mission but because her mission is to give these things a transcendent meaning and orient the hearts of men and women toward God. Then, as hearts are converted, and as people move toward God, they create a better world, a world that is in conformity with the will of God, a world in which all are brothers and sisters, a world in which all acknowledge this sense of transcendence that orients them toward God.

My dear sisters and brothers listening to this message on radio, this is the Word of God for this Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. It gives me great satisfaction to be able to remind you that life and the created realities of this life have no meaning in themselves. As long as created realities are not viewed from the perspective of their origin, that is God who brings them into being and gives them their beauty and stability, then they are vanity, illusions and passing. If God gives these realities their beauty and stability, then as we use

these things, we must look toward God to discover how God wants these things to be used. Let us be mindful of God and mindful of the fact that one day we will have to give an accounting of our attitude toward these realities. God will either reward us or punish us. Let us then use these things in the way that God desires and not in any other way.

In fulfilling this obligation, the Church suffers persecution and misunderstanding. But the Church cannot speak in any other way than to disturb those who want to sleep on their goods, their successes and their power. The Church must remind them, as Jesus did in today's Gospel: *you fool, this night your life will be demanded of you; and the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong? Have you forgotten that all these material things have their reason for being and exist and have a value and beauty only because God has given them these qualities?* So use these material goods as God intended them to be used. Give them a sense of transcendence.

And now raising our minds and hearts to God, we conclude our reflection with a blessing that I impart to you with all my love as pastor. May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit descend upon you. Amen.