

# THE CHURCH, CHRIST'S CONTINUING INCARNATION

**Our Lady of Mercy  
Chalatenango  
September 24, 1977**

My dear priests and sisters and faithful:

Who could have told us that today, September 24<sup>th</sup>, Our Lady of Mercy would give us her support on this historical occasion in Chalatenango? Yes, it is Mary, the virgin mother of Christ and the Mother of this Church who, in a very emotional way, fills this local parish that today will become an Episcopal Vicariate. This gathering of people proclaims that Mary, as a dear Mother and powerful Queen, accompanies us on our journey through history. Several centuries ago, during the Middle Ages, she inspired the foundation of the Mercedarians and today she is with us as we create the Episcopal Vicariate of Chalatenango. The Virgin, who suffers with those who suffer, wipes the tears from their eyes and comforts them in their sorrow, awakened in certain individuals the vocation to free Christians from the Islamic and Saracen dungeons. History recounts the Church's concern for those who suffer, whether they are incarcerated or in whatever other situation. The Church has always defended the freedom, dignity and human rights of men and women who are created in the image and likeness of God.

## **The Church, Christ's continuing incarnation**

As we have just heard in today's gospel, the Church looks with concern on this wonderful Department of Chalatenango which has been the source for many priestly and religious vocations. In this we find God's response through his Church, for the Second Vatican Council states: *through the Church, Christ communicates truth and grace to all* (a) and then explains *But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and spiritual assembly, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with men who govern, rule, teach and serve it.* Through this structure the Church transmits the truth and eternal life that Christ brought to the world. Therefore, using a comparison that in itself is rich in theological content, we can say that the Church is a continuation of Christ's incarnation. What is Christ's incarnation? It is that mystery that presents us with a God who in his infinite life becomes man in order to communicate, through human gestures, his life, truth, power and consolation. This is done in such a way that when the hand of Jesus touches the eyes of the blind man, it is the virtue of God that restores his sight. When the human voice of Jesus cries out in front of Lazarus' tomb *Come out!* (b), it is the virtue of God that, through this human voice, restores life to the dead.

The Church then is composed of a human element that is incarnated in us, that is, incarnated in the hierarchy who serve the people of God, and the laity who through their baptism and confirmation participate in the eternal priesthood of Christ. Thus the people and the hierarchy, the people and the priests form a visible assembly of women and men. Yet it is

not this visible assembly that is of interest to us but rather the fact through this visible assembly, we --- pope, bishops, priests, religious, and laity committed to the mission of the Church --- are lending our hands, mouth and feet to the eternal Christ. In this way God leads the Church along the paths of truth and eternal life.

### **Hierarchical organization of the Church**

When the hierarchy delegate their authority to Father Fabián Amaya as Episcopal Vicar of the Department of Chalatenango, then a hierarchical action is being performed. The visible government of the Church wants to take advantage of the new office that is called Episcopal Vicar, because without this human hierarchy, we would not be able to see the hand of Christ forgiving, or the voice of Christ speaking. And the Church is most interested in seeing that the eternal and divine message continues to be communicated to all people.

My dear Catholics, I invite you to accept with enthusiasm this hierarchical decision of creating a new vicariate. We can say that this is a new bishopric in the Archdiocese, that is, a priest with episcopal power. In union with the bishop, he will dedicate himself to organizing the life and ministry of the Church in the Department of Chalatenango. As we heard in today's gospel, it is Christ who is seated before the crowd who hunger for God; and so it is Christ who stands before the people with no resident priests or sisters. Yet here, in this place, you have given the Church so many wonderful vocations for the priesthood and religious life, like those that are in formation at the present time or those discerning a vocation in their work place and your communities. These vocations give great honor to this fertile land of Chalatenango.

As we look at the care of the Church for this area we see that this is a very lively sector of the Archdiocese. This morning, at this historical moment for Chalatenango, the Church extends her hierarchical organization and becomes more present in the midst of the people. This will enable the people of this Department to feel, in a more lively way, the action of Christ who shares the truth in his revelation, eternal life in his sacraments and priestly ministry and calls the families of this area to a greater holiness. In this way, instead of extinguishing this flame of devout Christianity, the flame will burn more brightly. Thus, our homes will be more holy and there will be greater fervor in the people. There will also be more vocations for the priesthood who in turn will serve the whole Archdiocese and the universal Church, for the priest is ordained for the worldwide Church. Among the youth of these communities, new vocations will arise from the young men and women who are willing to consecrate themselves to God and thus give a divine meaning to their life of service on behalf of humanity.

My dear sisters and brothers, we were motivated to make this change when we realized that this Department had produced so many vocations, and therefore we were unjust and perhaps careless in providing for the needs of the local church. Forgive us, for as a human institution we have our defects. Forgive our human weakness. But also know that this human dimension of the Church is the instrument that God has chosen to continue his incarnation. Therefore, if there are not concrete persons or priests, then the life of God cannot be transmitted to humankind. God's plan has always been this desire to entrust the ministry of communicating his life through these human channels. God wants to continue to communicate his voice, miracles, forgiveness and grace through the human gestures of the priests. As a result of this, the priest must be holy because he represents the person of Christ in the midst of humanity.

My sisters and brothers, I congratulate the whole Department of Chalatenango that has now become an Episcopal Vicariate. I congratulate you and thank you for the warm and fervent way in which you have accepted this decision. Know that in exchange for this service that this humble servant of the Church has provided for this Department, I thank you for the powerful encouragement of your loving presence, for the prayers of so many families, and for the devotion of so many people. In my heart as pastor, I do not know which is greater, the favor that God bestows upon us or the response of the People of God to these favors. But know that this morning you leave a lasting mark in my heart as pastor. I have always had a great admiration, love, and gratitude for the people of Chalatenango, for the devout ways in which you respond to God. From now on, under the direct care of Father Fabián and Father Efraín and all the priests who minister in the parishes of this Department, my Episcopal presence will be felt more strongly. You can be assured of the cordiality and loyalty of these priests who in communion with the bishop are building this Church here in Chalatenango.

I want to pay special tribute to the religious sisters who have known how to find a new dimension to their consecrated vocation. We have some religious congregations presently working in the Department and two others will soon arrive. We hope that others will also come to work with the priests and thus help us to respond to the spiritual needs of the people.

### **A pastoral appeal to the laity**

I not only call upon the priests and religious, but now I also direct my pastoral call to you, the laity. The laity are composed of all baptized Christians, marked with the sign of Christ, members of the People of God and responsible for the Church's history because the pastoral responsibility rests upon your shoulders. You, in your homes as parents, and as young people in the world, you are living the beauty of this hour so filled with hope. You are the protagonists of the Church's history. Lend it your arms, your strength, and your heart. Following the example of those Catholics who have come to an understanding of their commitment --- providing religious education as catechists, celebrating the Word of God, attracting people to the service of the Church and God --- let there not be any baptized person who does not respond to the challenge that is placed before you by the hierarchy: *Let us each play our part. It is now time for the people to respond generously to this Church that is an instrument of God. It is now time for the people to proclaim holiness, life, grace and all that is derived from these great eternal values and so necessary for our great worldly commitment.*

The Church today is also concerned that Catholics know how to discern the presence of social, economical and political realities that are detrimental to their Christian spirituality. The Church is concerned about this not because she wants to meddle in politics but because she has a responsibility to point out to people the true paths of God and denounce distorted paths, abuses of human dignity and of freedom and of anything that is sacred in humankind. The Church has not departed from her mission because she now preaches these other social dimensions of spirituality. Try to understand the new attitude of the Church and from your position as fearless lay persons who have a great love for the truth and Christ and his Church that loves you deeply, show your love for the Church. Do not be fearful and, even more importantly, do not betray this Church. In the Department of Chalatenango we have to struggle to establish the Kingdom of God. It is sad that we will find ourselves with those, who as Saint Paul said, were Christians at one time but now for political, social and economic

gain, perhaps even for a small amount of money, betrayed their baptism and have become spies and persecutors of their own sisters and brothers.

Let our Church move forward and do not mistrust her. The Church preaches love and if it preaches against the sins of the world and calls attention to the sinner, it does so, not to offend but to seek the repentance and conversion of sinners in order that they might be saved with those who seek the truth of God's Kingdom. It is hoped that everyone would understand this clear message of love and that it would not be distorted by the vile slanders that today are circulating among the people. Let no one be deceived about the Church's intention to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts of people and in families. This is why she seeks and she calls upon priests, religious, laity, and the young to become involved in this task. Indeed, all men and women, because of their baptism, have a commitment to work for the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

My sisters and brothers, in this context of great risks and many dangers, but also of great hope and great spiritual and pastoral consolation, Father Fabián brings all his apostolic enthusiasm to this area. I want to recognize him as a tireless worker for the Kingdom of God and one who has a great love for this Church that he wants to see become more authentic in the spirit of the gospel. Father Fabián has the full support of the chancery and the pastors of this area --- Father Efraín who is the pastor in Chalatenango, and all the pastors of this Department who are here, as well as the pastors of the Archdiocese. They have this support because the bishop relies on them and trusts them. I ask the people to have the same trust and to be one with the hierarchy.

The priest is the bishop of his people and the Episcopal Vicar is like the bishop of the Department. In our newspaper *Orientación*<sup>1</sup> you can read about the power and authority of the Episcopal Vicar. It is an authority that is comparable to that of the bishop. Thus, if the Episcopal Vicar denies permission to someone who then asks the same permission from the chancery, but does not mention that he has spoken with Father Fabián, then the permission is invalid. So too, if the bishop denies a permission to an individual, it must be made clear that this request was denied by the bishop when speaking with Father Fabián. If this is not done, the permission is invalid. This indicates that there is an intimate communion between the Episcopal Vicar and the bishop. They live in perpetual communion. In unity, the hierarchy, the pastors, and priests call upon the religious and the laity to raise up their voices and pray, as we heard in the gospel: *Ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest; for the harvest is abundant but the laborers few* (c).

Truly the harvest in Chatalenango is great and many arms are needed to gather in this harvest which has been given to us by pastors who have worked here. An example of this is seen in Msgr. Araujo, who worked here for twenty years and there are many others like him whom we honor and to whom we express our gratitude. As Jesus said: *You will gather what other have planted*. (d) We must work with this perspective for at some time our work will come to an end. My dear sisters and brothers, let us never have the attitude that we will work for Father so and so and unless it is this one, we will not work. Let us not have this individualistic attitude that ultimately makes our work unworthy. When we work just for an individual, we are not working for God. If we work for God, then we see the individual as an instrument and as the incarnation of Christ who is the only one who interests us.

My sisters and brothers, this is the message that today's event communicates to us. Now to show our official support, we are going to read the letter of appointment of Father

Fabián as Episcopal Vicar of the Department of Chalatenango and Father Efraín as pastor of this city.

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<sup>1</sup> See “La palabra del arzobispo. Chalatenango estrena su vicario Episcopal”, *Orientación*, 25 September 1977.

*Margin References* (a) LG 8: (b) Jn 11,43: (c) Lk 10,2: (d) Jn 4,37-38.