

## CHRIST, CENTRE AND GOAL OF HISTORY

**Second Sunday of Advent  
December 4, 1977**

*Isaiah 11:1-10*

*Romans 15:4-9*

*Matthew 3:1-12*

.....Saint Paul<sup>1</sup>, speaking to us in his letter to the Romans utters the words that were proclaimed today on the Second Sunday of Advent, that is, at this time the Church is reflecting on the great love of God who sent us his only Son to save us from all the problems of history. The first words of Saint Paul impressed me greatly as I prepared this homily because I believe that he is giving me an insight for this modest contribution in spreading the Word of God in this very difficult environment of El Salvador.

Saint Paul says: *For whatever was written previously was written for our instruction that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope* (a). Notice how the preacher of that time had to deepen his thoughts in the Scriptures because there was no other source for the messenger of the Church other than the Sacred Scriptures, the Word of God. This Word of God that was written centuries ago, however, does not remain ethereal, theoretical, disincarnated but rather the preacher must incarnate the word in the present reality. For this reason Saint Paul says that *by endurance and by the encouragement* --- here he speaking in the present, that is, he is speaking about the endurance and encouragement that we need today in order to live in this historical time. Thus joining the Old Testament writings with the endurance and encouragement we need today these writing enable us to maintain our hope.

My sisters and brothers, here we are speaking about the present history, the events of this week, today's events and not only the events that occur on a national level but those events that have a family character. Every family has had their problems during this week. Even more, each one of you and I myself have had our problems, our personal or family difficulties, difficulties in the neighborhood, in the town, in the nation and in the world. The preacher cannot lose sight of these actual circumstances unless one wants to preach a gospel that says nothing to the people of today. This is very easy to do. For this reason many people say: *Why in such and such a church or in such and such a part of the country are there no problems?* There will be no problems if we talk about the stars or talk about things that do not touch the problems that put our patience, strength and commitment to the test.

According to Saint Paul in today's reading, the Word of God has to be a work that is rooted in the ancient, eternal Word of God but this Word must also touch the present scars and today's injustices and abuses. It is for this reason that the Word of God creates problems. People begin to say: *The Church is meddling in politics. The Church is becoming communist.* These accusations begin to bore and tire us. Once and for all remember that the Church is not meddling in politics but rather her word is like a ray of sunshine that comes from on high and illuminates. What fault does the sun have when its pure light finds puddles and manure and garbage here on earth? The sun has to enlighten all of this. If not it would

not be sun; it would not be light; it would not find the ugly and the horrible that exists here on earth. Yes, just as the sun enlightens that which is ugly so too must the sun enlighten the beauty of the flowers and the other beautiful aspects of nature. My sisters and brothers, on the one hand, the Word of God illuminates the horrible, the ugly and the injustices of the earth and on the other hand, nourishes those of good heart, those hearts that thanks to God are numerous and are illuminated with this eternal light of his divine word.

This is what it means to preach the Word of God today --- a preaching that, as during the times of the prophets, must create problems and awaken hatred and stir up resentments. Indeed, as Church we have become the object of some of the most vulgar forms of resentment. My sisters and brothers, the fact that the garbage feels hatred in the light is what gives glory to the light. To be slandered by those who feel that we are touching on their injustices is an honor. It is for this reason that I tell you that I am not afflicted by these slanders. I thank you for the numberless manifestations of solidarity that have been presented to me during these days. But I tell you again, be joyful and confident that I am not afflicted by all of this, on the contrary, I am honored.

### **Events of the week**

My sisters and brothers, in light of the Word of God, how could we not feel the abuses that continue to occur in our country? Alfonso Muñoz was captured in Tacachico and it is not known where he is. Inés Merino was beaten near Zacatecoluca and again no one knows where she is. Thirty prisoners were deceived on the Hacienda El Porvenir in Cantón San Carlos Lempa and were also led away and have disappeared. Pedro Medina was captured while seeking work. My sisters and brothers, this situation cannot continue. People were imprisoned and accused of having participated in the occupation of the Ministry of Work<sup>2</sup>, but these accusations have not been supported even by the witnesses from the Ministry and yet none of those who were captured has been seen. There is no legal reason why these people continue to be imprisoned.

In light of these cases we understand and we want to put an end to this terror. But who is sowing this terror? I want to remind you of some of the Pontiff's words so that you will not say that these are my words. The day after the Holy See announced that the theme of this year's celebration of the World Day of Peace would be *No to violence and Yes to peace*, the Vatican distributed a press release which stated (and note well these words): *Violence can proceed from persons or groups who have handed themselves over to the folly of domination --- power, to the folly of consumerism --- the desire to have. This tends inevitably to limit and suppress the life of other human persons and societies and often leads to racism, genocide, including the imposition and maintenance of unjust and discriminatory political and economic structures by force.*<sup>3</sup> These are words of the Holy See. I have not invented these words here but simply repeat that there exists this folly of power and this desire to have and all of this is defended, if necessary, by unjust actions that include eliminating those who are opposed to this power and this desire to have.

At the same time let us not forget that we must be just. The Vatican press release continues: *Violence can also be characterized as a reaction of those who are or who believe they are oppressed and whose desire for life and justice ends in an explosion. Thus we refer to the violence of the weak, the violence of those who are deprived of certain fundamental rights.*<sup>4</sup> These persons, especially those who do not want to understand the meaning of the gospel or history, give in to their fantasies in their commitment to this life. It is not that they

do not appreciate us as Catholics who live this life that has nothing to do with communism. Indeed as Catholics we simply bring to the historical, temporal, and social dimensions of life the demands and fundamental principles of the Divine Redeemer.

### **Life of the Church**

I rejoice and want to greet the promoters of the movement *Fe y Alegria*. This is an educational system that is promoted by the Church especially in the marginal zones. In the chapel of the Externado San José eighty-one young men and women received their diplomas: the young women were awarded diplomas as seamstresses and the young men, diplomas in electronics and other masculine fields of study. I was very happy to tell them: *this is the Church that not only speaks but also acts especially in those areas where Christ saw people as sheep without a shepherd. Nevertheless, thanks to the work of the Jesuits and the collaboration of some religious women and laity, there has arisen this movement that has given a gospel meaning to the development of young people.* *Fe y Alegria* is doing many other things in these areas of the Archdiocese.

My dear sisters and brothers, concerning Christmas I want to use as a guide an initiative of the Diocese of Santiago de María. Bishop Rivera has asked people to make a contribution to some charitable work that will benefit those who are truly in need instead of spending money on Christmas cards and gifts. On my part, I tell you that I am going to save the money I would have spent on Christmas cards and deposit this money in a fund that we are using to assist people who are poor. For example, we are helping a widow with nine children (the oldest being 12 years old) whose husband was assassinated by the authorities in Dulce Nombre de María.<sup>5</sup> I am not saying here that if you want to do some good work that you have to give this money to the Church. We do not want to give any opening to those who slander us, therefore if it is not inconvenient I ask you to act charitably toward those whom you wish to help. If near your house there is someone who has not received any Christmas cards, bring this person a plate of tamales --- bring this person something that will be of assistance to him/her. There are many children who are not going to receive any toys. Do not give them toys and in particular do not give them toy guns because we do not want to teach them to be violent as children. It would be better to assist these children with things that are more necessary. Thus I place before you a call to celebrate a true Christian Christmas that does not consist in banquets or drunkenness or an exchange of meaningless gifts but rather an exchange of gifts that truly touch the poverty of our people who are poor.

The contest of Nativity scenes is now open and the parishes of the different towns and villages are invited to choose winners and bring those who have won this contest to the Cathedral on the sixth of January, the feast of the Epiphany, to receive their prize. We are promoting the use of Bibles in every home, especially in those homes that have made artistic Nativity scenes where the child Jesus, the Virgin and Saint Joseph are in the center. We invite you to continue to meditate on the Word of God throughout the year.

Do not forget, my sisters and brothers, that Thursday of this week, the eighth of December, is the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. This feast is celebrated in many places and I will be celebrating this feast in La Libertad. There was a custom that we seem to be forgetting, namely, that on the night of December 7<sup>th</sup> as a sign of our joy with the Virgin, bonfires are lighted and the doors and windows of our homes are illuminated with lanterns. Those who want to rejoice and honor Mary for this privilege of the Immaculate Conception have a scenic and folkloric way of doing this by decorating some corner of the

house. On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe we are promoting a procession that will be transmitted by radio so that all can hear the message of the Virgin. The Mass will be celebrated in the atrium of the Basilica. I also want to let you know that today in La Vega the people have begun a Novena in honor of the Virgin of the Redeemed. This is a very beautiful devotion of the people of San Salvador and I invite all you to visit the Virgin there in La Vega. Lastly, in agreement with the pastor of this Cathedral, Msgr. Modesto López, we are going to suppress the 9:00am Mass since this Mass at 8:00 is the principal Mass and is often prolonged beyond 9:00am which then disturbs those who are coming for the Mass at nine. I ask your forgiveness for suppressing that Mass and also for prolonging this Mass.

My sisters and brothers, I know that for many people this word is boring. People have told me this in anonymous letters. Again I give you the same answer: those who do not like these words can turn off their radio or simply not come to the Cathedral. But I see the attention that you give me and when I speak with friends who sincerely tell me the truth, they say that the occasion demands all of this because the moments of confusion and the slanders against the Church cloud the environment in such a way that it is necessary to enlighten these situations in an extraordinary way. For this reason we do what we do here. I thank you, my sisters and brothers, for the many manifestations of solidarity with these homilies here in the Cathedral. Your presence here as you fill the Cathedral is a powerful motive that stimulates me. I also know that together with this multitude gathered here in the Cathedral that expresses their courteous attention many other parish communities have placed loud speakers in the bell towers so that the people can listen to these homilies. Other communities record these homilies so that they can reflect on these later and they continue to reflect on these recordings so that they can learn more. I have no doubt that I am nothing more than the Lord's humble instrument. Jesus said: *Blessed are those who are not scandalized by me.* (b)

### **Christ, centre and goal of all human history**

My sisters and brothers, the message of this Sunday during the Advent season is beautiful. As I begin I want to read to you some words from the Council that talk about this world in which we live. (c) Reflect and see if we do not find reflected in these words what each one of us is experiencing in our conscience. The Council, speaking to the world today, says: *The imbalances under which the modern world labors are linked with that more basic imbalance which is rooted in the heart of man. For in man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways; on the other he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions he is constantly forced to choose among them and renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would.* Look at the two great evils of today. On the one hand there are people who live very comfortably and well --- in a situation that we could label as practical materialism; they have no time for and they give no importance to analyzing the dramatic situation of the country or their own conscience; they are very pleased in their gold cages. On the other hand, there is great misery and people who live in this situation are so desperate that they often have no time to reflect on their situation. What time does a poor person have who today is thinking about looking for work the following day and then very early in the morning, with his knapsack, leave on a journey to look for work? Instead of finding work such a person will often find prison or become one of those who have disappeared. These two extremes hinder this hour of Christmas and neither of these extremes allows us to see the Christ who comes among us.

*Many*, the Council says --- note this well so that you do not confuse the Church with communism. *Many look forward to a genuine and total emancipation of humanity wrought*

solely by human effort; they are convinced that the future rule of man over the earth will satisfy every desire of his heart (d). This is the illusion of some forms of liberation that do not think of God but rather rely on revolution and the powers of this earth. This is also the error of practical atheists because materialists, those who find their happiness in the things of this earth, do not have time to see God and believe that they can find Paradise here on earth. They will neither find Paradise nor will they be able to build this Paradise with repressive laws. A better world cannot be constructed with mere human arms.

*This is the insolence of those who believe that human existence has no meaning and therefore make every effort to give a purely subjective meaning to their life.* (e) This is definitely another temptation in our day. There are many, especially young people, who follow the philosophy of nihilism: if existence has no meaning then why do we live? Since life has no meaning then one shoots a bullet into one's head or ingests poison.

What does the Church say as she listens to these false answers to the dramatic situation of the present moment: The Council summarizes my homily: *The Church firmly believes that Christ, who died and was raised up for all, can through His Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his supreme destiny. Nor has any other name under the heaven been given to man by which it is fitting for him to be saved. She likewise holds that in her most benign Lord and Master can be found the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history* (f). This is the season of Advent and this is the word that I proclaim today.

Isaiah cries out as he sees the kingdom of Judah attempting to enter into an alliance with Syria and the Northern Kingdom and then with Egypt against the threats of the powerful Assyrian Empire. The prophet says: *Do you not see that all of this is a betrayal of God's covenant. Do you want to place your trust in armies? Are you saying that without an army there is no Judah or that without an army there is no Republic? Do you really believe that the efforts of men are able to save Judah from the present situation? Do you not realize that the evil is much deeper?* (g) People began to desert God and injustice began to be established among the people. There were abuses and all of this became a hindrance. They must convert and return to the Lord and then there will sprout up a new return of the house of Jesse.

Do you know who Jesse was? Jesse was the father of David, the king who was chosen by God to form a dynasty from which the Eternal King would be born: Jesus Christ. When Isaiah lived, this dynasty of Jesse was losing its splendor. It appeared to be a dead tree trunk, like a tree that had died. The prophet says: *God has promised that from this dead tree will come forth a prince who will act with justice.*

Listen to the beautiful description that was proclaimed today: (h) *Not by appearance shall he judge nor by hearsay shall he decide. He will judge the poor with justice and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.* Another beautiful description follows. The prophet uses the upheaval among the beasts of the jungle as a poetic image and says that when the people return to God and place their trust in God rather than in the armies of the earth or the unjust laws of humankind, the following will occur: *the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb* (i). He then continues to describe a situation that seems impossible: *the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together; a child will lay his hand on the adder's lair and no harm shall come to him.* My sisters and brothers, these are images that tell us that now the world appears to be a jungle where men have become beasts who fight and beat and destroy others. But when people return to God, when they

allow the kingdom of God to enter their hearts then the lion will not destroy and eat another lion or eat the lamb, but rather all of us, rich and poor, will become brothers and sisters who sit down together and eat together. We will experience the fatherhood of the Kingdom of God. This is the Christmas that the Church desires.

The second reading also speaks to us about a separation that today kills people --- a separation that also existed during the time when Paul wrote his letters, a separation between Gentiles and Jews. Saint Paul says that Christ came for all people.(j) He came first for the Jews as promised. In obedience to the plans of God, Jesus developed his mission in Palestine, in the Holy Land. When the Apostles, however, became aware that the Jews, the Israelites, the chosen people, had placed a false trust in their religion as if nothing were going to happen to them instead of repenting and returning to God, they then began to convert the Gentiles. Christ saved the other Gentile people who believed in God and so together with the faithful Jewish people they became the one people of God.

Therefore, in the gospel when Saint John the Baptist is presented today in front of the multitude we find that the Pharisees were also present. He speaks some harsh words to them: *You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?* (k) Hypocrites, you have taken the Kingdom of God away from the people who ought to come to know Christ who comes. Therefore, you, the leaders of the people, the religious leaders who can also commit errors, political leaders who also commit errors --- the people should be guided by you to an encounter with God, but you have separated people from this encounter and have established a false religion based on exterior realities and hypocrisy. My sisters and brothers, this is the hour of the prophets, the hour of the authentic Church, the hour of those who believe that they are saved because they believe that they are children of Abraham. No, John the Baptists tells them, if God is powerful enough to make sons of Abraham out of stones. (l) If you who were children of Abraham have become stones and hardened you hearts, then you will not enter into the Kingdom of God unless you change your hearts.

The comparison of John the Baptist is beautiful (m): the axe already lies at the foot of the tree, God has already started to cut it, we are already in the last times of history. Convert because the Kingdom of God is near. And the Son of Man, who comes after me, who is greater than I, whose sandals I am not even worthy to undo, is already clearing his threshing floor, winnowing fan in his hand so that the chaff is carried away and the wheat of good works remains.

Good works, Christian hearts, true justice, charity --- these are what God looks for in religion. A religion of Sunday Mass but of unjust weeks does not please the Lord. A religion of much praying but with hypocrisy in the heart is not Christian. A Church that sets herself up only to be well off, to have much money and comfort, but forgets to protest injustices, would not be the true Church of our divine Redeemer. For this reason the Church must perish, suffer, and be persecuted because many people do not understand and are comfortable in their present situation, even priests, and all of this is a hindrance to the authentic kingdom of God.

My dear Christians, this is the Word that the Church once again repeats as the feast of the Nativity draws near: (n) we will not have a new continent by simply changing structures, legislating new laws or repressing through force. This will only create more difficulties. There can only be a new continent, a new people with new women and men when, as Saint

Paul tells us today, people renew themselves interiorly, clothing themselves in Christ, converting and changing their hearts as proclaimed by Isaiah and John the Baptist.

My sisters and brothers, I experience a great joy because my word, which follows the same lines as usual, has found support in the prophet Isaiah, Saint John the Baptist, Saint Paul, Christ himself and the authentic Church that cannot perish as long as she is supported by the authentic Spirit of the gospel. I also experience this great joy because my word awakens all of you, my sisters and brothers in El Salvador, those who are pessimistic, terrorists, and devoted to repression, those who legislate vulgar laws against the people, all of you my sisters and brothers who are Christian and non-Christian, Catholic and non-Catholic and this Word says that there is reason to hope, that El Salvador can be saved, and that if, as indicated by Isaiah, John the Baptist and the Church, the people of El Salvador open their hearts to love and justice and true well-being then peace will be found.

My sisters and brothers, I invite you to make this time of Advent a time of preparation for the birth of Jesus, a time in which we sincerely examine our own hearts and then put aside all that which hinders the coming of Jesus into the world --- in fact, in some way each of us is hindering the coming of Jesus. Let us begin by preparing the roads in the desert. May the dry trunks flower and the rocks be converted into children of God! May the people of El Salvador who have become fierce beasts, who struggle one against another, be converted and become sisters and brothers, children of God! So be it!

---

<sup>1</sup> The greeting and opening words were not recorded on the tape of the homily.

<sup>2</sup> The building of the Ministry of Work was occupied on 10 November 1977 by members of the Popular Revolutionary Block (BPR) who were demanding a solution to the labour conflicts in the INCA and El León factories and an increase in the minimum wage. See *La Prensa Gráfica*, 11 November 1977.

<sup>3</sup> "No to violence, yes to peace", *Osservatore Romano*, 30 October 1977.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Reference to José Justo Mejía captured by the Hacienda Police on 9 November 1977 and found assassinated a few days later.

*Margin References* (a) Rm 15,4: (b) Lk 7,23: (c) GS 10: (d) GS 10: (e) GS 10: (f) GS 10: (g) Is 11,1: (h) Is 11,3-4: (i) Is 11,6-8: (j) Rm 15,8-9: (k) Mt 3,7: (l) Mt 3,9: (m) Mt 3,10-12: (n) M 1,3.