

## NO TO VIOLENCE, YES TO PEACE.

### The Epiphany of the Lord<sup>1</sup> January 6, 1978

*Isaiah 60:1-6*

*Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6*

*Matthew 2:1-12*

Beloved brother priests and faithful, distinguished members of the National Commission for Peace and Justice, esteemed radio listeners.

This evening the Cathedral, filled with faithful women and men, is the protagonist of a procession of people that began twenty centuries ago. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah announces to us that from the darkness of the world there would arise a people who would seek that mystical light that shone in Jerusalem: the light of God. In a beautiful poetic form the prophet has proclaimed this epiphany of God who became present among the people. Those who lived in doubt and darkness looked for this light. They looked for a stable peace and happiness that was finally found, as we are told by Saint Matthew in today's gospel, by those kings who were the first beneficiaries of this prophecy that was about to be fulfilled. Those kings from the East were in the forefront of this procession of people that has continued for centuries. Thus the prophecy of Isaiah was being fulfilled: *from all the ends of the earth people will come to the birthplace of Jesus to recognize him as God, King, Savior of humankind.*

This evening we are part of that procession. Blessed are those who, in faith, share the great joy of the kings for having found Jesus! Blessed also are those who, even though they do not have this faith, (it is certain that there are still people who doubt and live in darkness during these times of confusion), ask the question: does this peace really exist? Does this Savior Christ really exist? Is there really a God who can save us from the horrendous situation in which we find ourselves?

My sisters and brothers, we conclude three nights of reflection. I want to congratulate the lay members of the National Commission for Justice and Peace who have so profoundly echoed the teaching of the Church. Thanks to them we have listened to the profound theological reflections of the Archbishop of Panama here in this Cathedral. He is one of the great theologians in Latin America and focused his reflections not only on the Pope's message for this year 1978, but also emphasized the development of this theme throughout the history of the Church. The Church has always placed before people a message of peace, but this message has received greater emphasis during these times when this message has been so distorted by violence. In these situations we hear the firm cry of the Church's teaching.

Last night we listened to a professional<sup>2</sup>, a man living in the world, who brought together the thinking of the intellectuals of this century, men and women who understood that they had to examine the Church's teaching, men and women who with pure hearts understood that the Church has reason to cry out those eternal words: *No to violence, yes to peace*<sup>3</sup>.

My sisters and brothers, I believe that it is providential that together with this gift of Paul VI, that is, his message for the celebration of the World Day for Peace, we have also received a message directed specifically to the people of El Salvador. The Pope's words that were spoken to the Ambassador of El Salvador at the Vatican<sup>4</sup>, together with the message of the angels in Bethlehem, are made specific, like a homily directed to the people of El Salvador, *to those on whom his favor rests* (a). The Pope emphasized the fact that the sincere search of the people of El Salvador for peace, a search that we have witnessed during these past three nights, has an answer. If the hearts of the people of El Salvador continue this sincere search, they will find this peace. I want to gather together the hopes of Pope Paul VI and plant them in the hearts of the people of El Salvador and thus make this celebration of the Epiphany like that of the Three Kings, an encounter in which all the people of El Salvador find Jesus in the arms of Mary, the Queen of Peace. May we find Christ beneath his most beautiful sign: peace, the gift that symbolizes the fruit of our redemption. Peace was the greeting of the Risen Lord, (b) freed from the chains of sin which had now been redeemed, freed from the limitations of death and hell that were overcome by the redemption. With a word Jesus greets all people of good will: *My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you* (c), but not as the world gives peace. The Church continues to offer this gift of peace. Saint Paul calls Christ, *Pax Nostra --- our peace* (d) because he reconciled humanity with God and also women and men among themselves, and through his blood tore down the walls of hatred, violence, rancor, and resentment and planted the necessary conditions of peace: justice and love. *Love one another* (e).

Paul VI echoes these words of Jesus when he refers, with a well-informed insight, to the reality of El Salvador. I want to emphasize three ideas of his discourse and make this the final message of these wonderful nights that you, my dear sisters and brothers who have been present here in the Cathedral, have made most special with your enthusiasm, your welcoming, your hope and faith --- all of which are clear expressions of your desire for peace. The Pope speaks to us.

### **Without any distinction**

The first idea that I want to highlight is that the Pope in his discourse sees that the people of El Salvador look toward the center of the Church with hope. They look for peace and the Pope opens his arms to the Ambassador and says: *Allow us to pay a singular tribute, in your person, going beyond all due courtesy, of special esteem for El Salvador and each of its inhabitants, without any distinction.*

What a great heart in this representative of Christ! I believe that in this phrase there is an Epiphany, an encounter of the people of El Salvador with the representative of Christ on earth who plants peace on this planet.

The Pope cries out those words that have resonated throughout the world, *no to violence, yes to peace*. The Pope takes on the heart of El Salvador and goes beyond all due courtesy, like one who says: let us break the mold so that the hearts of all the people of El Salvador, without any distinction, might feel very close to the Pope. He said that he had thought often about our Republic with the solicitude of one who sees the people of El Salvador as his beloved children.

### **Guidelines of a social nature**

The Pope's second reflection revolves around some guidelines of a social nature. *We are well aware*, the Pope tells the Ambassador, *that the vast majority of Salvadorians live their lives with an ideal reference to their Catholic faith and do not forget the many practical implications that this condition involves on the personal, family, and social plane. All of this raises up a whole set of relationships and expectations to which the Holy See and the Church, faithful to their duty, cannot but give careful thought. In the first place recognition and praise goes to the commitment of the people of El Salvador to improve their general conditions of life, starting from that global view of man and of humanity that the Church teaches them.*

My sisters and brothers, this evening I am proud to be a Salvadorian and I want to say to all my fellow citizens that we should feel that we have been profoundly praised by the words of the Pope who, from a Christian perspective, understands our social concerns, understands the transcendence of faith in our struggle for liberation, who understands that we are different from what has been said about us by those who have slandered us in our struggle as Church. He understands that as Salvadorians we cannot break the relationship between our social concerns and our reference to faith. Therefore, the Church, as she fulfills her obligation and from a perspective of faith, must enlighten these realities of the world --- the lack of bread, living on the margins of society, being hungry and poor. When the Pope refers to this reality of El Salvador, the Church feels supported by the gospel and by the message of the Church.

Salvadorians carry their faith in their hearts and from this perspective of faith enlighten the realities of the earth. For this reason it is impossible to imagine a faith that is not incarnated in these realities, a faith like that of the Levite and priest who looked at the wounded man and traveled on because they had to pray (f). A faith that is only made concrete by distancing itself from the painful realities of the world would not be a faith that is in relationship with human suffering and with the difficult situations of our world. Blessed be God for the Pope has clearly stated that the Holy See and the Church cannot renounce this duty to orient the people who carry in their hearts a profound, transcendental faith and who from a faith perspective, struggle for an authentic, Christian liberation.

I also call upon everyone who is engaged in this struggle for liberation to renounce those liberations that are merely of this world, liberations that do not transcend history, and liberations that attempt to resolve the problems with hatred, violence and armed struggle. This is not the way to live as Salvadorians but is a deformity of our heart. When hatred and armed struggle and abductions and crime and bloodshed are enkindled in the hearts of noble Salvadorians, such persons are no longer authentic Salvadorians; they honor neither their country nor their faith. They betray this transcendence that has nourished them from the time that they fed at their mother's breast.

When the Pope speaks about this global vision of humanity that he has learned about as a member of the Church, he uses the words of his own letter, *Populorum Progressio*: *[The Church] shares the noblest aspirations of men and suffers when she sees these aspirations not satisfied, and therefore, she wishes to help them attain their full realization (g).* The Church wants to do this precisely because she places before humankind what she herself possesses: a global vision of humanity. The Church is proud to be able to speak this phrase: *The development we speak of here cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic, it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the whole man... We cannot allow economics to be separated from human realities, nor*

*development from the civilization in which it takes place. What counts for us is man—each individual man, each human group, and humanity as a whole (h).*

My sisters and brothers, let us realize that the one who understands us, the one who understands our concern for humankind is the Church. The Church is both human and divine. As human, the Church knows that there is nothing human that is foreign to her. All of our human concerns reverberate in her heart and she knows that the human person has a right to this development that is the new name for peace. (i) But again here the Church is referring to a development that does not consist in *having more*, especially in economic terms. Rather the Church desires the fullest development of humankind, all their faculties and especially their divine vocation.

### **An orientation of faith with regard to relations between Church and State**

The third thought of the Pope in his discourse to the Ambassador revolved around the relationship between Church and State. The Pope told the Ambassador from El Salvador: *The Church promotes and encourages these aspirations, within the sphere of her specific competence. For this reason, while she claims also in this country the indispensable freedom to preach the faith, teach her moral and social doctrine, and exercise her mission among men and women without hindrance, she always wishes to respect the competences of the temporal power in its sphere and to accept a constructive dialogue with the civil authorities, for the purpose of serving better the personal vocation of those who are once faithful and citizens. .*

The Pope cited the Council Document *Gaudium et Spes* in referring to the relationship between the Church and State and their place in the world. (j) Both Church and State have as their subject the human person and their vocation as citizens of the earth and their vocation as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, there should be no conflict between these two authorities who ought to promote the common good and provide for the happiness of people on earth and, at the same time, respect their eternal vocation, their orientation toward the Divine, their spirituality, and their development as Christians. Thus the Pope claims for El Salvador the freedom of the Church while reminding the Church that she must respect the autonomy of civil power. He pleads for a constructive dialogue whose objective should not be to obtain some advantage or privilege --- the Church must renounce all of these things when her witness in this relationship might be tarnished. Rather this dialogue must seek the best way to foster the personal vocation of those who are faithful members of the Church and citizens of this nation.

My sisters and brothers, this is the Church's ideal: to arrive at a healthy cooperation so that together, the government, which is charged with providing for the common good here on earth, and the Church, which is responsible for orienting people with regard to their eternal vocation, we might seek to develop the vocation of men and women --- a vocation that is not meant to divide heaven and earth but rather a vocation that, for the happiness of people, unites the development of each person's vocation as a faithful member of the Church and a citizen of this nation.

The Pope concluded by pointing out the fruits of these orientations: *The Church, in fact, believes that this is the way to prevent evils, overcome a climate of violence that unfortunately, has sometimes caused losses also in the ecclesial field.* Here the Pope makes concrete this *No* to violence in El Salvador, for if these Christian guidelines are followed, then evil will be prevented and the climate of violence overcome --- this climate that brings such great losses to the Church and to so many families.

As you can see the Pope does not brush aside the past, but calls it to mind. He does this with the hope that such situations will not be repeated but rather that we will look for harmony that will allow us to overcome this climate of violence. Our *No to violence* in 1978 has to seek out those roads that the Pope has pointed out. The Pope also said: *the Church believes that this is the way to construct a social atmosphere that is liberated from those evident injustices, which prevent all created things from being shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.* . These are the words of the Holy Father who recognizes the sad reality of the people of El Salvador: a social atmosphere in which the goods created by God do not enable all the people of El Salvador to live in happiness. We feel that for this beautiful Republic, with its fertile fields and beautiful skies, to bring happiness to all the people of El Salvador an atmosphere of justice and fraternal love is necessary. May we understand that we are sisters and brothers and that we have been showered with gifts from God and that these gifts are meant to be shared with all people.

My sisters and brothers, our *No to violence* must be rooted in the foundation of justice. In Medellin, the Bishops of Latin America stated in words that have been approved by the Holy Father that it would be impossible to have peace on the continent unless a new just order was also established (k). Peace is not simply the absence of war nor is it a fear of repression or a balance of powers based on fear. Peace is the fruit of justice and the flower of love and justice in the air. The Pope said that our *Yes to peace* is a *Yes to God* and we would add that our *Yes to peace* is also a *Yes to justice, love and understanding* among all the people of El Salvador. Only in this way will we have this pure affirmation of peace.

My dear sisters and brothers, this is our Epiphany, an Epiphany in which Christ presents himself to us under the name of peace. (l) Christ is our peace. At the beginning of this year 1978, may this peace that has resonated so intensely in this Cathedral, and through our radio broadcasts has also resonated in many homes, become a call to conversion. May those who do not feel this peace because of their selfish hearts fill their hearts with love. May those who are far from this experience of peace because their hands are stained with blood and criminal activity wash their hands in repentance and recognize that there can be peace for sinners and criminals if they repent and love. May we also hear the call to establish peace in our own homes. May there be love and reconciliation and may Christ become present throughout the Republic of El Salvador and in every person in El Salvador.

This homily, which is not mine, began in the Vatican with the Pope. The National Commission for Justice and Peace has echoed the Pope's words. People from other lands and Churches have come here to preach this message of peace. We have listened to the words of the Archbishop of Panama and other professionals. Thanks to God, the message of peace has been proclaimed. Now this homily concludes as it ought to conclude, namely, with a call to celebrate the Eucharist. A call that proclaims that these words about peace are not simply words, but rather words of life. This word is also Christ present in the mystery of his death and resurrection. Christ lives and offers us peace and waits for us to opt for light rather than darkness. May the light of the Epiphany, the light of peace, the light of love and the light of justice fill the atmosphere of El Salvador.

My sisters and brothers, we have come together to celebrate the Eucharist. I want to thank our beloved priests for their presence which makes this concelebration more solemn. I thank all of you for your presence and may this presence be changed into devout prayers of thanksgiving, for in this blood of Christ that we will adore and in this body of Christ that will

be offered to us, we become aware of the price that was paid for sin, unrighteousness and all the offenses against peace. From this altar may Christ repeat once again to all the people of El Slavador: *My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you* (m).

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<sup>1</sup> This Eucharistic celebration closed the three days of reflection for the Day of Peace.

<sup>2</sup> Reference to Dr Alfredo Martínez Moreno.

<sup>3</sup> See Paul VI, “*No to violence, yes to peace*”, Message for the World Day of Peace, 1 January 1978.

<sup>4</sup> The passages in italics in this homily and with no reference, come from the address of Paul VI to the new ambassador of El Salvador to the Vatican. See *Osservatore Romano*, 18 December 1977.

*Margin References* (a) Lk 2,14: (b) Jn 20,19: (c) Jn 14,27: (d) Ep 2,14-16: (e) Jn 15,12: (f) Lk 10,29-32: (g) PP 13: (h) PP 14: (i) PP 76: (j) GS 76: (k) M 2,14: (l) Ep 2,14: (m) Jn 14,27.