

CHRIST, UNIVERSAL SIGN OF SALVATION

The Epiphany of the Lord
January 8, 1978

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

My dear sisters and brothers.

Before beginning the homily, we have the pleasure of listening to Father Robert Drinan, a Jesuit. This priest, who visits us, is a member of the United States Congress. With the permission of his superiors he has dedicated himself in a very effective way to the politics of North America. He was the Dean of the Law School at Boston College. During the days that Archbishop McGrath was with us, he spoke eloquently about Father Drinan. He said that his political role in no way diminished the meaning of his priesthood. One of his priestly gestures has greatly impressed me: he wanted to concelebrate with me this morning in order to express his communion with the Church.

On behalf of the Archdiocese that is present this morning at this Mass here in the Cathedral, I want to express our gratitude to Father Drinan because we have received many expressions of solidarity, support and help from our sister Church in the United States. Father Drinan's presence among us is the presence of the North American Church and through him the bonds of Catholic fraternity between our Churches are strengthened. We are going to listen to him as he greets our Archdiocese. His words will be translated by Father Ronald.

Message of Fr Robert Drinan¹

Your Excellency, Bishop Romero, clergy, sisters and brothers gathered here.

Today we celebrate the feast of the Three Kings who, following the star, arrived from the East and finally found Christ in the manger. Each one of us must also follow our star, the star that guides us to Christ.

Each nation and country also has a star to follow. Today El Salvador is following her star along a very difficult road. The People of El Salvador recognize the fact that they have a right to expect that their lives and dignity as persons will be respected. The people of El Salvador recognize and realize that they have a right to expect that the laws of their country will be respected. The good people of El Salvador recognize that they have a right to their human, economic and political rights. The people of El Salvador do not want communism or Marxism and anyone who says that the people or the clergy of El Salvador are inviting communism here, these persons are insulting the intelligence of all the people of El Salvador. The people of El Salvador want to have their human rights as they are proclaimed in the gospel and in the international laws of every country.

Some persons here in this country and some public officials are fearful of the equality of people and the dignity of all people. These same persons and officials want to silence the voices of the priests and deport them from the country. They imprison the priests and, in one form or another eliminate those people who proclaim this dignity and equality. But the people, the faithful of El Salvador, are united with their clergy, with the Archbishop --- a very dedicated man --- and are in solidarity with all the principles of Catholicism.

The Congress of the United States vigorously wants these human rights to become a part of your lives and the lives of all people in the world. Congress strongly supports President Carter, Jimmy Carter, in his pronouncement that the United States will continue to struggle so that human rights are respected everywhere. These rights include: the right to be free from threats and disturbances from the government and others. These rights also include the right to have a credible press, a press that people can trust. Furthermore, these rights include the right to food, work and a decent home. Seven years ago I entered Congress with a mandate to make these rights a part of the lives of people in every land. The struggle for equality here in this country is closely watched by the Congress of the United States. Congress has great hope and offers you their hearts, their work and their prayers.

All of us, like the Three Kings, are following our star in this new year. Let us remember the words of the founder of the Jesuit community, Saint Ignatius: *when we want freedom, equality and rights, we have to pray as though everything depended on God. And when we want this freedom, we have to work as though everything depended on us.* Thank you.

My first words² are words of gratitude and admiration for this illustrious member of the United States Congress who in his message to the people of El Salvador has shown the courage of a Christian in the political arena, one who has risen above the fluctuations of the political world and placed before us the eternal values of the gospel. I thank him because his words are very valid and support and confirm the words I spoke at the beginning --- there is a very strong communion among the Churches of the world. We have the impression that our Archdiocese, in communion with the Pope and in communion with the Church throughout the world, is walking in pursuit of her star.

What a beautiful expression as Father Drinan said: *every people has their star.* I believe this is precisely the meaning of today's celebration. As the Kings from the East followed their star and found Jesus who filled their hearts with great happiness, so too we, in these hours of uncertainty, shadows and darkness, must continue to follow our star, the star of faith. It is our fidelity to this faith that will enlighten all people. Thus my sisters and brothers, I want to place my reflections on the Epiphany in this context. In find in today's Biblical readings three thoughts that coincide with the message that the people of El Salvador need to hear:

1. The universality of Christ's call
2. The equality of all people as proclaimed by Saint Paul
3. The idea of transcendence seen as the light of God that can result in the interior renewal of each person --- a renewal that we all need.

The universality of Christ's call

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah describes the beautiful panorama of a kingdom of God that reflects the presence of God in Jerusalem. Through this presence, God becomes light, a light that dawns for this people who walk in darkness. The expression used by the

prophet Isaiah is unequalled: *Rise up in splendor! Your light has come. The glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the people; but upon you the Lord shines... Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you. Your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses... Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come* (a). This is the beginning of a long list of people who, like the Three Kings, come forth in search of the star.

The Epiphany is the name of today's feast. The child, who was born in Bethlehem and became light during one of the longest nights of the year, is a sign that God is present. From his light that is like a dawn that blunts the darkness, a new hope is given to the people. The Kings from the East are the first ones to receive this gift. That day marks the beginning of a long process, and more and more people will join in this procession. The feast of the Epiphany has been transferred to today, the eighth of January. We here in this Cathedral, together with the communities that join us in our reflection, are part of that procession. It is no longer just *the dromedaries from Midian and Ephah*, no longer just *the people from Sheba*, but now it is whole continents: the people from Latin America, Africa and Asia. From all lands people come together in this unity of faith in Christ.

My sisters and brothers, look this morning at this Church here in El Salvador, a dot on the world map, and see how this Church is extended. We feel as though we are sisters and brothers with all the people of Central America, with the people of this Continent, with the people of North America and Canada and Europe. We are all called to follow this light.

It is also beautiful to consider that in this convocation of people, God --- the God of all nations --- respects the freedom, the nature and the unique way of being of each people. The reading from Isaiah tells us: *the riches of the sea shall be emptied before you, and the wealth of nations shall be brought to you* (b). This kingdom of God certainly has no need of our material goods but we recognize that God, who is the origin of our coffee crops, our canals, our cotton, our wealth and all the wealth of the world, has a right to all of these things. So we generously offer these things to God. Perhaps it is better to say that we offer all of this to God in the same way that the Three Kings placed gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh before the child Jesus. Everything that the world produces belongs to God. The wealth of the Church as the Kingdom of God is the realization that all the differences among the people of the world come from God. God has created in this world a wealthy kingdom like no other kingdom. All the marvels of the earth are from God. Everything that is produced by the distinct human cultures comes from God. All the wealth and progress of people is promoted and oriented by God.

As priests throughout the world offer the bread and wine to God, they say: *through your goodness we have this bread and wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands*. When we say *the work of human hands* we understand this as meaning the work of people throughout the world. We offer all of this to God, because human work and human progress have no meaning without God. All of us contribute to this kingdom of God.

My sisters and brothers this is the time to feel that we are truly the people of El Salvador and to tell the Lord that all the wealth that he has given to us is indeed his. As images of God we have to work so that all people benefit and are happy as children of God. The Pope said to the Ambassador from El Salvador: *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*³. This is the richness of the Epiphany: a call to all people, enlightened by the light of the Lord, to live as sisters and brothers so that within every nation people might live as brothers and sisters and share equally in the natural human resources.

The equality of all people

My sisters and brothers, my second thought is based on the words of Saint Paul who tells us today that he was an arrogant persecutor of the Christians because his heart was closed and because he believed, like the Jewish people of his time, that God existed only for the people of Israel, for the people who lived according to the Law of Moses. It seemed to him that it was a desecration of the national identity to preach a Christ who proclaimed a kingdom for all people. This Paul, close-minded as a Jewish man, now stretches forth his heart to the whole world and realizes that God has called him to be a herald of the great plan that had been hidden for centuries. He says in his letter to the Ephesians: *the Gentiles are coheirs, members of the same body and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus (c)*.

This is the reason for our equality. There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. (d) There is no longer a privileged people and people who live on the margins of society. In the mystery of Christ all are coheirs, that is, the inheritance of God our Father is for everyone, for all those who are sisters and brothers. Christ is our elder brother, and as heirs of all the promises we become his sisters and brothers, coheirs. This is a word that was invented by Saint Paul. This *coheir* means an equality that cannot be expressed in any other way except by saying that people are equal as sisters and brothers and have inherited the same inheritance. Thus we become coheirs of all that God has promised.

In Christ we are all called to this wealth of the Kingdom of God. We are members of the same body. Saint Paul develops the meaning of this equality in his theology. (e) He says that all of us are members of one body and were not meant to live separated from one another and divided among ourselves. We need one another. The head can never tell the feet that they are unnecessary and the hand cannot tell the heart that it is unnecessary and the heart cannot say that any other part is unnecessary. Each part has its role and is a part of a living body.

This is precisely the way that we must function as Christians in El Salvador. We must recognize that in this country of many baptized persons, each individual has a role to play and the acceptance of this role will bring happiness to our country and create a nation where there is no longer violence and repression, a nation in which some people no longer feel they have a right to everything while others live on the margins of society with no rights. We will create a nation in which everyone feels like a contributing member, even those steeped in poverty --- for from their poverty and their work they will love the whole body and serve the whole body. Neither the head nor the heart will feel superior to one another, for each part has a role to play in the human body and mutually depend on and need one another.

This is the equality that Christianity preaches. We do not preach an equality that cuts off heads so that all can be equal. That would be crazy! That would be a utopia! We do not preach an equality that silences all people. Rather we preach an equality in which all people can feel like they are children in a home that supports them and provides them with good things. As we said during these days when we celebrated the World Day for Peace: *Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of the cemeteries or the product of violence and repressions that silences our voices. Peace is the calm and generous*

contribution of all people toward the common good. Peace is dynamic and generous. Peace is a right and an obligation that enables every person to occupy their place in this beautiful family that the Epiphany enlightens with the light of God.

There is another comparison in Saint Paul's letter that expresses this idea of equality: *you are copartners in the promise of Christ Jesus* (f). When we read the Bible, look at how many promises there are of God's love for humanity, promises made through Jesus Christ. God promises nothing apart from Christ. God calls us to conversion in Christ. But in Christ, the sum of all things, we discover and find all of God's promises. In Christ all people discover this equality. Christ fulfills God's promises and thus the happiness of people and the hope of heaven depend on the degree to which we accept this doctrine of Jesus Christ.

I was most happy to listen today to a Congressman from the United States, a priest who, functioning on behalf of the common good of the great people of North America, has not lost sight of the gospel vision which he must preach because of his vocation and essence. I repeat, I am pleased to listen to this priest and congressman speak in defense of the rights, equality and the freedom of people for as you can see this is not simply a matter of the political arena. Yes, it is a political matter but it is rooted in the gospel. The gospel defends and proclaims all of the great, fundamental rights of the human person. It proclaims that equality that even when it loses its political convenience, never loses its gospel roots. Let us suppose that tomorrow it is no longer convenient for the United States to be a defender of rights of El Salvador, then in this human sense the political system will have failed us, yet the gospel will never fail us but will continue to cry out for the freedom and the dignity of the human person, even during the worst conditions of persecution. The Pope has just recently said: *The Church claims as her own this freedom to preach her gospel, a gospel that defends people and cries out for their dignity and freedom.*⁴

My sisters and brothers, on this feast of the celebration of the Epiphany, on this day when we celebrate the contribution of all people to the Christian common good, it is most symbolic that a man from the United States should bring us a message in priestly language and tell us that the Epiphany is not simply a calling to mind of what the Three Kings did twenty centuries ago. Rather this feast celebrates the contribution, the support and the communion of all those persons who we find gather together in the name of Christ and his gospel and who are copartners in the great promise that God made to humanity. Thus there is no distinction among people for all are children of God, members of the same body whose head is the God who became man. We are all heirs to a happiness on earth and a hope in a life hereafter.

Transcendence is the light of God

Finally my brothers and sisters, let us remember that this preaching of the Church is in no way subversive, for the Church does not preach revolution. Father Drinan, with all the prestige of his role and the wisdom of a lawyer, has just reminded us that those who want to attack the Church and accuse her of being communist, insult our Christian way of thinking.

In other words, when the Church preaches in defense of these rights and on behalf of freedom and equality, she does so because the Church is part of this reality of transcendence. I would like for everyone to engrave in their hearts this concept of transcendence. In the reading from Isaiah we heard these beautiful words: *Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come, the glory of the Lord shines upon you!* (g). Saint Paul expresses this same

idea when he speaks of the fact that the Spirit has revealed the great plan of God to the holy apostles and prophets (h).

What is this transcendence? Transcendence tells us that we, as members of the Church, do not preach a liberation that is merely of this earth, a revolution that might resolve all our problems with violence and abductions and repression and crime. This is not the voice of the Church. Yes the Church always preaches that men and women must be free, equal, worthy and raised up by the light of God. The light of God shines upon us. The dignity that the Church proclaims is focused on the human person who breaks away from the chains of sin and becomes a child of God. The Church proclaims a dignity that is not rooted in *having more* --- this is secondary. The promotion of the human person is rooted in the conscience of people who ought to feel that they are children of God, enlightened by God and intimately renewed in the depths of their hearts. In Medellin the bishops said: *there will be no new continent without new men, who know how to be truly free and responsible according to the light of the Gospel* (i). In other words, transcendence is a renewal in God.

The light of God ought to enlighten this struggle of the Church and this renewal in Christ and the hope that even though on this earth we might not find paradise, yet this earth must in some way reflect the reality of paradise. The Kingdom of God, which will find its perfection in eternity, must nevertheless be reflected here on earth, especially in the relations between people. The citizen of heaven must first of all be a good citizen on earth. Those who want to be copartners in the promises of eternity have to collaborate with God in establishing justice, peace and love in this kingdom on earth. Thus the struggle of the Church is precisely to plant a great love, to awaken a greater hope, to bring sinners to repentance and conversion and to lead all people to an interior renewal. If we do not understand this language about the light of the Epiphany, we will never have a clear concept of the liberation that is preached by the Church.

My dear sisters and brothers, these are my three thoughts on this feast of the Epiphany: the universality of doctrine that we are perfecting and the equality of all people. A doctrine that is learned by the light of Christ and a result of transcendence --- thus, like the Three Kings, our horizon moves beyond the limits of this earth, beyond the limits of the stars and we draw closer to the life of God who came to enlighten us and make us truly happy.

My sisters and brothers, together with my beloved brother, Father Robert Drinan and with our beloved brother priest who has rendered a wonderful service of translation, Father Ronald, we now approach the altar and we do so in representation of all the people. Let us remember this morning that all of us, not just those who are approaching the altar, but all the people whom we, as ministers of the altar, represent ---- all of us should carry in our hearts the sentiments of the Three Kings: a great faith in Christ whom we have found as the source of our joy and hope; a great happiness in having found Christ; a commitment to collaborate with Christ so that this kingdom that was initiated in the manger in Bethlehem and that through the adoration of the Three Kings began to expand to all the horizons of world --- yes, may this kingdom be recognized by all the people in our nation and by all the people on this earth and thus make El Salvador and the world the Kingdom of God on earth. So be it.

¹ The text that follows is the transcription of the simultaneous translation of the message of Fr Robert Drinan who shared the homily with Archbishop Romero.

² After Robert Drinan's message, Archbishop Romero continues the homily.

³ See Paul VI, Address to the new Ambassador of El Salvador to the Holy See, *Osservatore Romano*, 18 December 1977.

⁴ See *ibid.*

Margin References (a) Is 60,1-2,4,6: (b) Is 60,5: (c) Ep 3,6: (d) Gal 3,28: (e) 1Cor 12,12-26: (f) Ep 3,6: (g) Is 60,1: (h) Ep 3,5: (i) M 1,3.