

# CHRIST SAVES ALL, AS A PEOPLE

**Second Sunday of Ordinary Time**  
**The Baptism of the Lord**  
**January 15, 1978**

*Isaiah 49:3, 5-6*  
*1 Corinthians 1, 1-3*  
*John 1, 29-34*

My brothers and sisters.

It is important that each day we have very clear in our mind what the Church attempts to accomplish as she gathers us together each Sunday. In light of our faith, the Church unfolds for us the mystery of Christ. At the beginning of the Liturgical Year this mystery was proclaimed to us during the four weeks of Advent. We participated in the divine preparations as God placed before us his great plan to send his Son to save the world. We participated in that moment that Scriptures call *the fullness of time* (Galatians 4:4). Christ became incarnated in the womb of the virgin from Nazareth and was born in Bethlehem. Even today that holy night brings joy to the world, even though many do not understand that the cause of such joy is founded on the reality that *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son so that the world might be saved through him* (a).

Christmas is followed by Epiphany Sunday. The birth of this child in Bethlehem and his arrival into the world would have been useless unless he was revealed. Thus the meaning of Epiphany is a revelation or manifestation. The first beneficiaries of this revelation were the three kings from the East whom we remembered last Sunday. Today we celebrate a new Epiphany, namely, the Baptism of Jesus. At the river Jordan, John the Baptist, inspired by God, points out Jesus and presents him to humankind. The Messianic Era has begun. *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (b). There is no salvation apart from Christ. Thus we come together today to celebrate the prolongation of the Epiphany. The heart of each participant in this Eucharist ought to grow in great hope and joy because Christ is God, the Redeemer of humankind.

During the Liturgical Year, besides unfolding the mystery of Christ, we also celebrate feasts which evoke the mystery of Christ: feasts of the Virgin and the saints and various patron feasts of our towns and villages. Today, for example, I want to highlight a popular devotion which the Liturgical Year makes accessible to the masses, to the people. Today we celebrate the feast of the Christ of Esquipulas. This Christ is the crucified Christ, an Epiphany. This mystery of the Savior Christ in Central America is called the Christ of Esquipulas and is a center of attraction for all of Central America (a true bond that unites us as a people of Central America). This mystery is also a mystery of the Church who possesses a power that humankind and politicians are unable to make real. The Church of Central America is united in one faith. This Central American Christ of Esquipulas becomes Salvadorian. Here in our Archdiocese there are three places that will celebrate today their patron feast: the parish of San Bartolomé Perulapía will celebrate a solemn Eucharist at 4:00pm; in Aguillares, under the name of the Christ of Mercy, the community will have their

solemn celebration tomorrow at 11:00am; in the parish of Colón, the people will also celebrate today the feast of the Christ of Esquipulas.

The Church is so profoundly incarnated in our people that we celebrate this reality as something that is typically ours. Christ wants it to be that way --- this Christ of the Epiphany, this God who became a child. Through the birth of Jesus we feel that this child is a member of every family. We all feel that he is ours. Thus this mystery of Christ, that unfolds during the Liturgical Year, wants us to feel intimately united with this Jesus. Let us feel as though Jesus is there for us, for as Saint Paul said: *he loved me and offered himself up for me* (c). Thus my desire is to present this mystery of Christ each Sunday in a way that enables us to realize that this mystery is not far from us, not in the clouds. I do not want to preach in a way that would lead one to say that what I preach here in El Salvador could be preached in Africa or during some other period of history. Rather I want to preach so that Christ becomes incarnated here, in El Salvador, in 1978. Christ accompanies us in the changing situations of our current history. Christ illuminates the events of this week. This is the Epiphany that we must celebrate because Christ has been incarnated and has become a member of our history. Christ wants to accompany every person and every family and every people. He wants to make the history of each Christian and every people their own salvation history.

### **Events of the Week**

From this perspective I want to speak with you about certain events. I do so not because I want to meddle in affairs that have nothing to do with the Church, but because I want to incarnate my words in these realities.

For example, in our history today, when we celebrate the feast of the Baptism of Jesus who revealed himself as the Savior of people, how could we ignore the fact that during this past week, here in El Salvador, we have been discouraged by a striking contrast between two different articles in our newspapers? On the one hand we have seen a rejection of the preaching and message of Father Robert Drinan whom you listened to here in the Cathedral eight days ago.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, we have also seen a presentation of the visit of the Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States.<sup>2</sup>

I see a contrast between these two events. While the declarations of Father Robert Drinan provoke many to be scandalized, others were given great hope. Yet the presence of the Human right Commission is announced in such a way that it appears that this commission is being manipulated and awakening doubts and fears. Father Drinan provokes scandal because he touches a sore spot. Moral theology speaks of three kinds of scandal. True scandal provokes one to sin. At times it is referred to as normal scandal or scandal of the truth, but it is truly evil and scandalizes mature and good living people. There is another scandal that is called scandal of the faint-hearted or infantile scandal that refers to those who are scandalized by everything. A third scandal that is also sinful is the scandal of the Pharisees --- the scandal of those who cannot tolerate Jesus. This type of scandal causes people to be scandalized when injustices and disorders are pointed out. You can draw your own conclusion about the type of scandal that is involved in the publication of the articles that I referred to before.

At the same time we can see people recognize the courage in the voice of this priest who denounced those realities that the Church has continually denounced and who pointed out the real fears that exist in our people. In reality, there are people who should present themselves

to the Human Rights Commission but do not have the courage to do so because they also experience real fear. What does all of this say to us? It shows that when Father Drinan spoke about the fear of the people and the *campesinos*, he was not lying. This is a reality that we are very much aware of in our present situation. There are *campesinos* who ought to come forward, but do not have the courage to do so.

Therefore I ask: how has this visit of the Human Rights Commission been presented? What pictures have appeared in the newspapers portraying the victims of the abuse of human rights? <sup>3</sup> Who gives echo to the voice of those who have been abused? We see favoritism in the reporting and we can say that those who have accused Father Drinan of speaking in a prejudiced way are doing the same thing with the Human Rights Commission. We hope that, with the maturity and courage that Father Drinan spoke about, the proponents of human rights in Latin America who are now present in El Salvador will know how to rise above this intrigue and manipulation and thus able to discover the truth by listening to those who should be heard. The Commission has asked for collaboration and I, in the name of the Church, want to tell you that the voice of the Chancery has always asked for this same collaboration so that truth and justice are brought to light. We have always denounced injustice and so in light of these denunciations we place the following questions before the members of this Commission. Do you know how to respond to the question that arises from so many of our homes --- where are the disappeared? An answer to this question would be sufficient. Provide this information to so many of our families who are suffering and do not know if their loved ones are alive or dead. Where are they? What is their situation?

This is the incarnation of Christ in our history and among our people. For this reason, my sisters and brothers, it is painful to present our poor country in this light, but the fault for a bad picture is not that of the photographer but the object that is dealt with.

We have been saddened this week and join together with the people of Nicaragua and lament the assassination of the news reporter Doctor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro. During our weekly interview on Wednesday, we expressed our solidarity with the suffering of the victim and his family and with the truth that he proclaimed. At the same time we reject every type of criminal activity.

Many letters from Amnesty International have arrived at our office inquiring about the situation of various prisoners. I was moved by the questions that were raised concerning the case of Lil Milagro Ramírez. We also received letters from the family of Victor Manuel Rivas and Julio Antonio Ayala. Their words filled me with emotion: *For us the Church is the voice of justice and the voice of those who are not listened to.* Thank you for understanding this. My sisters and brothers, the Church does not want to be another voice that is confused in the tumult of distortion and manipulation of the news. She wants to be the voice of the voiceless.

### **Life of the Church**

My sisters and brothers, in the name of Christ who said, *that all may be one* (d), I announce with joy the celebration of a week of prayer for Christian unity. Protestants and Catholics have prepared a program that was published in *Orientación* and that will be read here in a short time. We will celebrate the traditional week of prayer from January 18-25. I ask all of you, Catholics and beloved Protestant sisters and brothers (I know that you listen to me and I thank you for telling me that you listen with great devotion --- thank you!) to pray

that this scandal of division among Christians be eliminated and this will happen if we truly love Christ and the gospel. The division among Christians hinders people from coming to a knowledge of Christ. On the other hand, unity among Christians gives great credibility to Christ's Church. Let us not be a hindrance but rather let us join together in that one faith that Christ desired: one fold beneath the divine staff of the one Pastor. (e)

I have not had the opportunity to thank and congratulate all those who made possible the celebration of the World Day for Peace. This time together to reflect on the theme of peace left very profound and noble echoes in all the participants and this fact alone merits recognition and our thanks. As a result of this unforgettable celebration, I also want to remind you to read and reflect on the pastoral message that some bishops have published on the occasion of this New Year.<sup>4</sup> Also the members of the National Commission for Peace and Justice published a message as a commentary on Pope Paul VI's message: *Yes to peace, no to violence.*<sup>5</sup>

I have not had the opportunity to read you a message that arrived recently from the Bishop of Tegucigalpa who had been invited to participate in our seminar on peace. He wrote: *I am sad that I cannot accept your kind invitation but I wish you much success during this seminar.* As a sign of our fraternity, the priests from the seminary traveled to Tegucigalpa to participate in a seminar for seminary formators. They gave a birthday cake to Bishop Santos, the Archbishop of Tegucigalpa and he said to them: *Please take half the cake to the Archbishop of San Salvador as a sign of our unity.* His words reflect my previous words when I spoke about the Christ of Esquipulas, for indeed the Church in Central America is united. It is the political system that causes so much division. Hopefully one day we will live this faith that Christ proclaimed to us: *that all may be one* (f).

The time has arrived for our schools to open their doors once again. I want to remind the Catholic Schools that they must meditate profoundly on the recent document that was published by the Sacred Congregation for Education.<sup>6</sup> You know that the Church watches over the ministry of the Catholic Schools through this Sacred Congregation (we might compare this to the Department of Education). The Pope exercises his role as teacher through the Catholic Schools. I want to remind you of these words that appear in the document: *To carry out her saving mission, the Church uses, above all, the means which Jesus Christ has given to her. She establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of the human person and of history is developed and conveyed.*

*One must recognize that, more than ever before, a Catholic school's job is infinitely more complex, more difficult, since this is a time when Christianity demands to be clothed in fresh garments, when all manner of changes have been introduced in the Church and in secular life, and particularly, when a pluralist mentality dominates and the Christian Gospel is increasingly pushed to the side lines*<sup>7</sup>. These words of the Pope demand that Catholic schools put aside those traditions that separate them from the Church's teaching. Our Catholic schools must not accommodate themselves so that they become pleasing to certain families. Indeed, when our schools act in this way they cease to be messengers of the Church's truth for people in these combative times.

The document goes on to state: *Lay involvement in Catholic schools is an invitation to cooperate more closely with the apostolate of the Bishops, both in the field of religious instruction and in the more general Christian education which they endeavour to promote by*

*assisting people to a personal integration of culture and faith and of faith with living.* Let us avoid the creation of those shameful situations where students graduate from our schools having learned about the faith but fail to translate this faith into action and then create situations of injustice, sin and all the other disorders of a corrupt society. If the Catholic schools want to be a missionaries of the Church, they must remember that their mission is always connected to and in communion with the Church's teaching. The document states: *the Catholic school receives from the Bishops in some manner the "mandate" of an apostolic undertaking.* We cannot conceive of a Catholic school that wishes to follow lines of action distinct from the Church's teaching. Let us keep this in mind so that we know whether we should classify a school as truly Catholic or not.

Lastly I want to speak about the religious life that is very much alive in our local Church. During these days the Bethlemita Sisters have begun their pastoral mission in El Paraíso. The Sisters of the Assumption are now present in Chalatenango where they will care for the community of Potonico. Very soon the Guadalupana Sisters will go to Arcatao. They are participating in a course of acculturation to prepare themselves for this new mission that has been entrusted to them. We also had the pleasure of greeting the Superior Generals of several Congregations who visited us during these days. The Superior General of the Dominican Sisters of the Assumption who work in Santa Tecla, Suchitoto and Quezáltepeque; the Superior General of the Oblates of the Sacred Heart who work in the Colegio Sagrado Corazón (the Sacred Heart School), Aguilares, Lourdes and in Dulce Nombre de María (Sweet Name of Mary); the Superior General of the Oblates of Divine Love who direct the Colegio La Sagrada Familia (the Holy Family School), the Escuela Católica María Dimagio (The Catholic School Maria Dimagio), and direct the pastoral ministry in Citalá.

As you can see my sisters and brothers, there are many realities in which the gospel message is becoming incarnated and it gives us great pleasure to realize that in a truly active Church, the mystery of Christ is prolonged in El Salvador. Thus in light of this reality, it is very easy to construct this homily. Today's readings present us with three thoughts that we should live intimately as Christians and thus throughout this Liturgical Year we will be able to come to a greater understanding of the mystery of Christ.

1. God wants to save everyone
2. In his letter Saint Paul writes: *God wants to save us by forming a people on this earth.*
3. God saves people by taking away the sins of the world. The gospel presents Jesus at the time of his baptism as the *Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*

### **God want to save everyone**

Our first thought is based on the words of the prophet Isaiah who speaks in several very descriptive chapters about the Servant of Yahweh. Who is this Servant of Yahweh? This remains a mystery: it could be some mysterious person or it could also refer to the people of Israel, but in any case now this prophecy is seen as a reference to Jesus Christ, the true Servant of God. This Servant of God is given a mission: to bring together the small number of people who are now scattered in the desert. God tells him: you will be my Servant who will re-establish the tribes of Jacob and become a light to the nations so that my salvation might reach the ends of the earth (g).

My sisters and brothers, this thought fills us with joy. We, the people who live here in El Salvador in 1978, are embraced by this universal perspective of God in Christ. This Servant of God becomes salvation for all the ends of the earth. Here today, on this feast of the Christ of Esquipulas, the crucified Christ who is present in Central America and in our Diocese, is also the Servant of God and the Christ whom we believe has gathered us together to celebrate this Eucharist and also gathered together our sisters and brothers in so many other communities where they are meditating on these words. The Council states: *Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Supreme High Priest, is present in the midst of those who believe. For sitting at the right hand of God the Father, He is not absent from the gathering of His high priests, but above all through their excellent service He is preaching the word of God to all nations, and constantly administering the sacraments of faith to those who believe, by their paternal functioning. He incorporates new members in His Body by a heavenly regeneration, and finally by their wisdom and prudence He directs and guides the People of the New Testament in their pilgrimage toward eternal happiness* (h).

We ought to be filled with enthusiasm to know that no one, neither you nor I, is excluded from this salvation. God calls everyone and therefore the Church cries out for justice and rejects violence, the scandal of the Pharisees, lies, crime and persecution. We never cry out for vengeance and persecution. We call sinners to repentance, for God desires to save them. Those who have killed and slandered and persecuted others are invited to return to God. They are like the prodigal son whom the father awaits to receive and save. (i)

My sisters and brothers, I ask you, the faithful who listen to me with love and devotion, to pardon me for saying this, but it gives me more pleasure that my enemies listen to me. I know that the reason they listen to me is that I extend to them a message of love. I do not hate them nor do I want revenge. I wish them no harm. I beg them to be converted, to be happy with the same happiness that you have. Like the son in the parable who was always with his father, you possess the joy of your faith (j). I want them to feel like a friend of mine who told me yesterday: *know that everyone who is good is with you*. My sisters and brothers, I do not know how to distinguish between good and bad people. Everyone is a child of God and the Lord loves everyone. Today's readings present us with a universal call to salvation.

### **God wants to save us by forming a people on this earth**

My second thought is the following --- God wants to save us by forming a people on this earth. He does not want to save us in isolation. Thus today's Church, more than ever before, emphasizes the meaning of *people*. The Church experiences conflicts because she does not want a mob; she wants a people. A mob is a heap of individuals; the sleepier, the better; the more compliant, the better. The Church rejects communism's slander that she is the opium of the people. She has no intention of being people's opium. It is others who create sleeping mobs.

The Church wants to rouse men and women to the true meaning of being a people. What is a people? A people is a community of persons who work together for the common good. And what is the common good? The Council states: *the common good is the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own development* (k).

A society's or political community's reason for existence is not the security of the State, but the human person. Christ has said: *The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the*

*Sabbath* (l). Jesus places human persons in a position that makes them the objective of all laws and institutions. The human person is not for the State, the State is for the human person. The development of humanity depends upon our concept of the human person.

I want to read this passage from *Populorum Progressio* that Pope Paul VI referred to during his discourse with the Ambassador from El Salvador: *this is what will guarantee man's authentic development --- his transition from less human conditions to truly human ones* (m). See, the reference here is not to some mass of people but rather speaks of the transition of each person and every person to more human conditions.

The Pope then describes these conditions. Let us remember that the Pope is speaking about people when he describes the following less human conditions: the lack of material goods that are necessary for at least a minimum standard of living; a moral poverty that results from selfishness. Less human oppressive structures arise from the abuse of acquiring more things and from the abuse of power and the exploitation of workers and the injustice of negotiations (n). These are less human conditions. Can we not see reflected here certain realities of El Salvador?

The passage to more human conditions is described by the Pope: *the rise from poverty to the acquisition of life's necessities; the elimination of social ills; broadening the horizons of knowledge; acquiring refinement and culture. From there one can go on to acquire a growing awareness of other people's dignity, a taste for the spirit of poverty* (o). It is admirable that the Church places this spirit of poverty among the more human conditions. The poor person who lives a spirit of poverty is not underdeveloped but rather is humanly developed. The more a person lives this spirit of poverty, the more human one becomes. The more one becomes a victim of avarice, the less morally developed is that person.

The Pope continues: *More human conditions are: an active interest in the common good, and a desire for peace. Then human persons can acknowledge the highest values and God himself, their author and end. Finally and above all, there is faith --- God's gift to people of good will --- and our growing unity in Christ, who calls God, the Father of all people* (p). What a beautiful description of a people! The day the people of El Salvador escape from these less-human conditions and as persons and a nation live in more human conditions, not only of merely economic development but of the kind that lifts them up to faith and to adoration of only one God, then our people will know the meaning of true development.

Here Saint Paul speaks to us about the Church of God in Corinth. (q) We can replace this *Church of God in Corinth* with the words *Church of God in El Salvador* or Church of God in whatever place we want to refer to. In these days, priests in communion with their Bishop work for the promotion of the human person and this ministry is not subversive or communism or a desire for power. We respect temporal power, but we want to create in people's consciousness a feeling of being a people, not a mob. We seek the development of individuals and a well-being that violates no one's rights but consists of love and faith between persons, between the sons and daughters of the Father of all.

Because the Church preaches this promotion of the human person, she has been slandered. Yet where the Church refrains from this kind of preaching, she experiences no problems. Therefore I say to all the pastoral ministers --- priests, religious, Catholic schools, pastoral movements --- we have to follow the lines that Saint Paul points out: we have to make the Church of God the community that Christ handed on to us. We must build a

community that is inspired by love and thus able to become a leaven in a pluralistic society. The Church does not want to make everyone Catholic but wants Catholics to be true missionaries who communicate this message of human development and who know what it means to be that leaven of unity, development, light and critical consciousness. As a result of the different ways of thinking in a pluralistic society, the Church wants to form critical consciences that understand the diversity that God desires. Therefore we should not judge everyone with the same criteria but rather create, with the human person, that pluralism that enhances --- with the beauty of pluralism --- the unity of the nation and the beauty of our own reality as the people of El Salvador.

### **God saves the people by taking away the sins of the world**

Finally my sisters and brothers, I present my third thought: Jesus is presented in the River Jordan as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. John the Baptist says: *after me is to come a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me* (r). John announced the coming of Jesus because the salvation of humankind consists in receiving this baptism of the Spirit that Jesus offered.(s) Jesus wanted to instill the life of God in the hearts of people so that they might be renewed interiorly. In this way he would take away the sins of men and women, the sins of the family and society. This is the mission entrusted to the Church, a difficult mission: to uproot sins from history, to uproot sins from the political order, to uproot sins from the economy, to uproot sins from wherever they are. What a difficult task!

She has to confront conflicts in the midst of so much selfishness, so much pride, so much vanity and so many people who have enthroned the reign of sin among us. The Church must suffer for speaking the truth, for pointing out sin, and for uprooting sin. No one wants to have a sore spot touched, and therefore a society with so many sores twitches when someone has the courage to touch it and say: *You have to treat that. You have to eliminate that.* Believe in Christ! Be converted! Jesus alone can take away the sins of the people of El Salvador and create a true community, a People of God that God would truly be proud of. God created diverse people as a family.

How beautiful to think of God as the Father of all people, of people who live according to the way of God and embrace this pluralism of nations! What a great diversity of individualities! Just think of the countries of Central America, each one has its own distinct characteristics --- five children of God. How wonderful it would be if these five nations, freed from the sins of their history, politics and society and their relations among one another, were to present themselves on this feast of the Christ of Esquipulas as brothers and sisters of Christ, peoples of God, having made the transition from inhuman conditions to a situation where they live as children of God, images of God's presence on this small piece of land known as Central America!

My sisters and brothers, do you see how the Incarnation of Christ, who is born in Bethlehem and revealed on the feast of the Epiphany, has to be a concrete light that illuminates our reality here in El Salvador? As a people of El Salvador and as Church, we express our desire for these realities as we proclaim our faith.

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<sup>1</sup> See *La Prensa Gráfica* for 13 January 1978 where two items were published under these titles: "Interior rechaza acusación de jesuita sobre repression" and "Creen parciales juicios del jesuita Drinan".

<sup>2</sup> The Commission of Human Rights of the Organization of American States (OEA), consisting in Dr Carlos A. Dunshee of Abranches, Dr Fernando Volio and Professor Tom J. Farer, visited El Salvador from January 11 to 18 1978 to investigate the observance of human rights in the country.



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<sup>3</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* for 13 January 1978 published a photo of relatives of the security forces under the following head: “Victims of terrorism. Relatives of members of the National Guard, who have died in action against terrorist elements operating in the country, appear today before the Human Rights Commission of the OEA”.

<sup>4</sup> Message signed by Mons. Oscar A. Romero, Mons. Arturo Rivera Damas and Mons. Marco René Revelo. See *Orientación*, 8 January 1978.

<sup>5</sup> See *Orientación*, 8 January 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Catholic School*, (19 March 1977). Full text published in *Osservatore Romano*, 31 July 1977.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

*Margin References* (a) Jn 3,16: (b) Jn 1,29: (c) Ga 2,20: (d) Jn 17,21: (e) Jn 10,16: (f) Jn 17,21: (g) Is 49,6: (h) SC 7: (i) Lk 15,20: (j) Lk 15,31: (k) GS 26: (l) Mk 2,27: (m) PP 20: (n) PP 21: (o) PP 21: (p) PP 21: (q) 1Cor 1,2: (r) Jn 1,30: (s) Jn 1,33.