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# TRANSCENDENCE AND ETERNITY

**Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**31 July 1977**

*Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23*

*Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11*

*Luke 12:13-21*

My dear radio audience.

This Sunday, which in liturgical language is called the Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time, I do not have the good fortune of celebrating the Eucharist with you because, as I previously told you, I have had to travel to Costa Rica to participate in a meeting of the bishops from Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Thanks to technology, however, I have been able to record this message so that I can be with you at least during these moments of reflection on the Scripture readings that are proclaimed this Sunday.

### **The life of our church**

To begin this reflection on the word of God that we have heard, I am thinking concretely of this archdiocese where we are making this reflection to nourish our community. Above all, I want to greet all those dear people listening on the radio and cordially invite you to prepare spiritually for the celebration of our patronal feast on August 6, the Divine Savior of the World. I want to direct some kind words to the community of Citalá, where the people's lives are nourished by this divine word. This is a lovely town located on the frontier of our republic with Honduras. Last Monday I had the privilege of celebrating Corpus Christi there with the sisters and that very fervent community. I thank you for the very warm reception you gave me, a reception that is a sign of the way you receive this word of God. I became aware there of a very generous trait that I would like to propose as an example to many communities. On Sundays, even though they have no regular priest, the people are summoned by the bells and gather in the church; at the same time that Mass is being celebrated in the cathedral, they listen to the celebration on the radio until Communion time. At that time the sisters distribute Communion to the community, and they conclude with their own prayers. In this way the word of the cathedral homily reaches that community, and they receive it with the same fervor as do those in our great temple. I congratulate you for this original initiative, and I hope that many other towns and villages where there are no priests will be nourished in the same way by this spiritual reflection on the word of God.

When we were returning with the beloved pastor of La Palma, Father Vito Guarato, we visited the parish center in La Palma. We saw there the devotion that nourishes the spiritual life of that parish community. Their spiritual life is quite original

in the way it's translated into everyday practical deeds, such as the workshop called *La Semilla de Dios* (the Seed of God) under the direction of Mr. Fernando Llort and his collaborators. The community there develops its manual skills at the same time that it grows in the Spirit, in reflection on God's word, and in prayer. May the Lord bless this work initiated by the Holy Spirit, and may the whole community of La Palma continue to grow. This visit nourished my spirit as pastor for I saw what is possible for a community when they understand how to incarnate the word of God in their everyday life. How wonderful it would be if all the economic, social, and political conflicts and situations of the world could be resolved in the same way that they are dealt with in La Palma: with great love, a great sense of work, and a great spirit of prayer.

We also want to commend with gratitude the efforts of those who are charged with preparing different aspects of the celebration of the Divine Savior of the World. There is an active committee of priests and lay people who have taken charge of the diverse aspects of this complicated celebration. We say «complicated» because we want it to be splendid so that the Divine Savior of the world will receive due homage from the archdiocese and the country and will bless us abundantly. The program is already known, and those in charge of developing the various details are working hard and with great love for our Divine Redeemer.

We have announced that on the morning of August 5 there will be a gathering of the Apostleship of Prayer in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We have also invited all Catholics to the traditional *Bajada*, which will take place at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon and will be broadcast by radio. Those unable to attend can tune in to this event on radio YSAX, and I also ask those who will participate in the procession to make their radios available to the crowds by tuning in to this station.

For the evening of August 5 we invite everyone who desires to pray for the nation to come to the cathedral. There, together with community prayer groups and the Movement of Renewal in the Spirit and under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will intensify our prayer for our country and our church. On August 6 at 9:00 o'clock in the morning we expect all the parishes to be present under their banners in the Plaza Barrios in front of the cathedral, where we will have the privilege of honoring the Divine Savior of the world in a solemn celebration.

We have stressed the purely spiritual aims of this celebration, and we ask all Salvadorans to refuse to be guided by ill will. Therefore, do not attribute evil intentions to the church. Our aim is simply to honor the Divine Savior of the world and to bring his blessing on this beloved people that has been blessedly placed under the beautiful name of the Divine Savior.

Even as we remind you about these events that are part of the life of our church, we are mindful also of the many realities that form part of our everyday life. Let us think of our fields that need rain; let us think of the harvests we hope for; let us think of the beauty of our countryside and the life of our country. If only we could see these things in all their profundity. And it is precisely to this that God's word invites us today to help us view these realities in their proper perspective. This is the message I would like to highlight for you and for me today, dear radio audience: the message of transcendence.

## **Transcendence and the autonomy of the temporal**

Transcendence means looking toward the eternal, toward God, toward the divine. Only when the material things of the world and the wealth of the earth are viewed in relation to God who created them do they have any meaning. When we view the riches and the goods of the earth without taking God into account, all things are vanity. That is what the Council says in a succinct phrase from the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: «Without the Creator, the creature would disappear». I am going to read you the whole section from the Council document, which seems to me the best commentary on today's readings. It comes from section 36 of the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, and it reads as follows:

Now, many of our contemporaries seem to fear that a closer bond between human activity and religion will work against the independence of men, of societies, or of the sciences.

If by autonomy of earthly affairs we mean that created things and societies themselves enjoy their own laws and values which must be gradually deciphered, put to use, and regulated by men, then it is entirely right to demand that autonomy. Such is not merely required by modern man, but harmonizes also with the will of the Creator. For by the very circumstance of their having been created, all things are endowed with their own stability, truth, goodness, proper laws, and order. Man must respect these as he isolates them by the appropriate methods of the individual sciences or arts. Therefore, if methodical investigation within every branch of learning is carried out in a genuinely scientific manner and in accord with moral norms, it never truly conflicts with faith. For earthly matters and the concerns of faith derive from the same God. Indeed, whoever labors to penetrate the secrets of reality with a humble and steady mind is, even unawares, being led by the hand of God who holds all things in existence and gives them their identity. Consequently, we cannot but deplore certain habits of mind, sometimes found too among Christians, which do not sufficiently attend to the rightful independence of science. The arguments and controversies which they spark lead many minds to conclude that faith and science are mutually opposed.

But if the expression, «the independence of temporal affairs», is taken to mean that created things do not depend on God and that man can use them without reference to their Creator, anyone who acknowledges God will see how false such a meaning is. For without the Creator the creature would disappear. For their part, however, all believers of whatever religion have always heard his revealing voice in the discourse of creatures. But when God is forgotten the creature itself grows unintelligible (GS 36).

This passage from the Council is the most authoritative commentary on the Scripture readings of this Sunday. When the Old Testament tells us, «Vanity of vanities! All things are vanity!» (Eccl 1:3) it is giving the perspective of a creation that prescinds from the Creator. All is truly vanity. Things have no meaning in themselves; they have only that autonomy of which the Council speaks. That is, things have their being, their beauty, their own value because God has given it to them. In this sense, things recover

their full beauty when they are viewed with that transcendence, with that orientation, with that basic perspective toward God. Then they are no longer vanity but have their proper beauty even while mindful that they are receiving it all from God.

### **The church's mission is to give things their transcendent meaning.**

In this regard we must also analyze the wonderful gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ for this Sunday. When the man asks Jesus to help him in making his brother share his inheritance, Jesus tells him that he is not a judge over temporal affairs. Jesus is telling the man to look to the origin of worldly things because they are not the source of happiness. It is not just having things that makes a person happy; it is having things, but always looking to God and God's will for these things. «Take care», Jesus tells the people, «and be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions» (Luke 12:15).

Here we have a warning of Christ about earthly goods. The church, like Christ, is not here in the world as a judge or an arbiter regarding temporal goods. The mission of the church, as clearly stated by the Council, is not social or political or economic; it is a religious mission (GS 42). The mission of the church is to give a religious, transcendent dimension to politics and to all earthly affairs. That is why the church feels intimately connected to the things of this world: she knows how to unite them with the will of the Creator. When people subordinate these created realities to sin, then the church must denounce this. That is not how God wants things to be used. Greed is not the law of earthly things. Nor is it selfishness. Things are not possessed only to make a few people happy. The will of God, who has created all things for the happiness and welfare of all persons, demands that we in the church give these things a transcendent meaning, their true meaning according to God's will.

What happens when people lose this vision of transcendence is described magnificently in the parable of today's gospel. That rich man's whole happiness consisted in reaping a great harvest, filling up his barns, and enjoying his possessions in a life of leisure. He forgot about death, and he forgot about God. That is why the gospel reminds him, «You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you, and all the things you have prepared, to whom will they belong?» (Luke 12:20). This is the vanity spoken about in the first reading: working so hard to acquire so much and then having to leave it behind. We will be accompanied in the eternal judgment only by our internal attitudes, the way we manage earthly things, uniting them to God and keeping transcendence in view.

This is, then, the mission of the church in today's world: urging people to view with transcendence their own attitudes and all the political, economic, and social realities of earth. Temporal duties, human rights, everything belonging to the earth—all of these are of great interest to the church, not because they are the goals of her mission but because her mission is precisely to give them a transcendent meaning and to orient people's hearts toward God. Once converted to God, these hearts will create a better world, a world more in conformity with the will of God, a world in which we feel we are brothers and sisters, all with a sense of transcendence toward the Creator.

My dear sisters and brothers listening on the radio, this is the word of the Lord for this Eighteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time. I have wanted to recall, along with you, that life and the things life gives us have no meaning in themselves. They are emptiness, they dissipate, they become diluted as long as we do not see their origin, which is God who gives them their being, their beauty, and their consistency. If God gives beauty and consistency to the earthly things we possess, then we cannot use them without having our eyes set on God in order to ask him how he wants us to use them. Let us not forget God, and let us not forget that one day we will have to give an accounting. Our attitude with regard to the things of earth will receive a response from God, either a reward or a punishment. Let earthly things be used the way God wants them to be used and not in any other way.

In fulfilling this obligation the church suffers persecution and incomprehension, but the church cannot speak in any other way. She is bound to disturb those who want to rest on the laurels of their goods, their triumphs, and their power. The church must remind them, as Christ did in today's gospel, «Senseless ones, do you not know that you must give an account to God for these things? Have you forgotten that things have their reason for being, their existence, their consistency, their value, their beauty only because God is giving these qualities? So use them as God intended them to be used, with a sense of transcendence».

And now lifting ourselves to God, we conclude our reflection with a blessing that I lovingly impart to you as pastor. May the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit descend upon you. Amen.