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## CHRIST, THE EPIPHANY OF GOD'S SAVING LOVE

### Feast of the Epiphany

7 January 1979

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience, today we are celebrating one of the most important feasts of the liturgical year; it's called the Epiphany. It's properly celebrated on the sixth of January, but we transfer it to the following Sunday, which is today, January 7, so that people who can't attend Mass on a weekday won't miss out on the celebration and the wonderful message of the Epiphany. The role of the Epiphany in the liturgical year is to bring the seasons of Advent and Christmas to their culminating point. From the beginning of Advent, the church was announcing to us for four Sundays: «The Lord is coming!» It was a time of spiritual preparation. And on Christmas God arrived. But that insertion of divine life into history is so important that the church prolongs the cries of Christmas, and with a new impulse she makes them even stronger on this day of the Epiphany.

«Epiphany» is a Greek word that means manifestation or revelation. Today the child who was born in Bethlehem is made manifest, and the salvation of God that comes through him is also revealed. Those of us who during Advent were all day sighing, «Come, Lord!» at last on this day find him. All humankind, in the figure of those magi from the East who come to adore and offer gifts, now finds God in that child.

The word «epiphany» has a religious sense in Greek culture. For the pagans it meant the unexpected but benevolent appearance of a divinity who brought wellbeing and salvation. It's similar to that other Greek work we've already explained, *parousia*, which was the official visit to a city of an important personage, generally someone possessed of supreme authority. In our case, however, the authority is divine. It is God who is visiting, who is coming to this world with salvific intentions. That is the meaning of the Epiphany in the Sacred Scriptures. In the New Testament and especially in Paul it means that, in Christ, God has appeared as the true savior of humankind. Epiphany can also signify the second coming of Christ, when he will appear at the end of time to judge all of history.

The full import of the meaning of this feast of the Epiphany is so great that in the East, where they perhaps have a more profound theological intuition, they celebrate both Christmas and the manifestation of God on this very same day. In the East the sixth of January is Christmas, and at the same time it is the manifestation of God being born in that child.

In the breviary that we priests read, there is an antiphon, a short verse, that sums up the long history of this feast of the Epiphany. The antiphon joins together three events from the gospels: the adoration of the magi, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, and the first miracle of

Jesus, which was changing water into wine. By uniting together those three astonishing epiphanies into a single mystery of manifestation, the antiphon presents today's feast as a marriage, as a form of mystical nuptials between God and his church. God, in his compassion for sinful men and women, comes to save and purify them and to make humanity his spouse for all eternity. The actual antiphon reads thus: «Today the church has been joined to her celestial Spouse because in the Jordan Christ washed away her sins. The magi hasten to the royal wedding, and the invited guests celebrate with the water made wine». This is a precious synthesis of the three different epiphanies: first, the adoration of the magi; second, the baptism of Christ in the Jordan, when the heavens opened up to manifest him to the world with the words, «This is the Son in whom I take delight» (Matt 3:17); and third, the miracle in Cana of Galilee, where Saint John tells how the Virgin interceded for the married couple when the wine ran out, so that they wouldn't suffer shame at their wedding feast. At the end of that account the Gospel of Saint John states, «This was the first sign that Jesus did to make manifest»—epiphany!—«his glory and his power in the world» (John 2:1-11). Sisters and brothers, let us meditate on this magnificent day when God takes in marriage our sinful humanity that is in great need of purification and salvation but that also, through this intimate encounter with Christ, feels its deepest hopes revive.

As is our custom, then, we'll give our homily a title that synthesizes all our thoughts. It will be «Christ, the Epiphany of God's Saving Love». We call this feast Epiphany because Christ is the epiphany of God's saving love. And in keeping with our style, we will develop this thought with three ideas. The first is that the Epiphany reveals a transcendent salvation, that is, a salvation that comes not from within humanity but from without—it transcends our capacity. This is the first idea: the Epiphany reveals to us a transcendent salvation. The second thought is this: the Epiphany offers a universal salvation. No one is excluded. This gift that comes in Christ is revealed to everyone and is offered to everyone. God's saving love is offered to all. Both here in the cathedral—now totally filled—and through the radio, thousands of those who hear me are invited, thank God, to this great feast, to this royal wedding. All of you (and I as well) are invited to participate in this joy, this hope, this salvation. No one is excluded. But there is a condition, and this is my third thought: like the magi, we partake of this salvation and this love of God by faith; there is the need for faith.

### **The Epiphany reveals a transcendent salvation**

My first thought is that the Epiphany reveals a transcendent salvation, and I fix my sight on the first reading from Isaiah: «Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem, for your light has come! The glory of the Lord shines upon you, and his glory surrounds you» (Isa 60:1-2). Isaiah is a prophet and at the same time a poet; he was encouraging the Israelites who returned from exile in Babylon and became disheartened when they beheld Jerusalem totally destroyed. Isaiah felt the need to lift up their spirits, so he told them, «Though Jerusalem has been left this way by its enemies, it is still the hope for our people The glory of God will shine bright over this same Jerusalem!» All the promises of the Old Testament pointed toward something glorious that would rise up there in Jerusalem, but it would not be the city itself. In Jerusalem there were only ruins, there were only pessimism and a tremendous sense of frustration. From its own innards Jerusalem could yield nothing good. There was therefore a need for something transcendent, something coming from beyond. A new day would dawn over Jerusalem, and it would be the light of God himself becoming incarnate in the heart of Jerusalem.

How can we not be filled with hope ourselves, sisters and brothers? In these days when we realize that our human strength can do no more, when we behold our homeland stuck in a dead-end alley, we realize that truly a transcendent salvation is needed. When we say, «Politics and diplomacy achieve nothing here; everything is destruction and disaster, and to deny it is madness», then truly a transcendent salvation is needed. Over these ruins of ours the glory of the Lord will shine. That is the great mission that Christians have at this critical moment of our land: keeping hope alive. We should not be expecting a utopia or entertaining illusions that drug us so that we can't see the reality. To the contrary, we should be closely observing this reality which by itself can yield nothing, but which can still produce wonders if only we appeal to God's transcendent redemption.

In the light of this reflection, I would also like to consider the star that guided the magi. It reminds us of a prophecy from the remote times of Balaam. When King Balak asked Balaam to prophesy on behalf of his armies, the prophet, inspired by the Spirit of God, looked toward the desert and saw the glory of Israel encamped there. Among his marvelous oracles, he said this: «I behold him, but not near. A star shall advance from Jacob and a scepter shall arise from Israel» (Num 24:17). No doubt Saint Matthew saw all these Old Testament prophecies being fulfilled in Christ, so when his gospel spoke of the mysterious star, it was thinking of the prophecy of Balaam: «A star shall advance from Jacob. It is still far off, and centuries will pass, but it will come—from far away the star will draw close». The star of the magi makes immediately present the transcendence that is coming to save us. The scepter prophesied by Balaam is without a doubt the scepter of David, whose reign will have no end because from his royal progeny will be born the scion who will be the son of David according to the flesh but who will be at the same time the Son of God in eternity—and his reign will have no end. This the mystical meaning of the star. On this feast of the Epiphany, the star is the sign of transcendent salvation; it is a sign of something coming from the world of the stars, from the immensity and power of God. For God has not created us to live in misery; rather, he marks out for us, amid these gloomy times in which we live today, a bright exodus toward salvation. Perhaps we can say with Balaam, «We see it in the distance. We don't know when this redemption will arrive, but it will surely come. We see that star coming close, and out of the Lord's power will rise that scepter which will save us» (Num 24:17).

Also, in today's second reading Saint Paul speaks to us about the revelation of a mystery hidden for centuries, namely, that salvation is for everybody. It's wonderful to realize that all of us are heirs of that revelation. We are waiting on that mystery hidden in the bosom of God, but we know that he loves us and will give us his very self to save us. Salvation comes from God, sisters and brothers, let us have no doubt about it. Therefore I'm going to repeat now, in this homily, some concepts that are of transcendental importance.

I make the observation in my pastoral letter on the people's political organizations—and I don't want this to be forgotten—that the great service the church is providing today, here in El Salvador, is the one Paul VI described to me when he was old and his voice was weak. When I had the good fortune of shaking hands with him, he told me, «Accompany your people in their just demands—without hatred and without violence, but always with justice». Inspired by these words, we wrote our pastoral letter, but we also drew on the pope's reflections in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, the exhortation on evangelization in the modern world, for that is precisely what this revelation, this Epiphany, of the church has to be here in El Salvador in 1979.

The service the Church renders to the people's struggles to achieve justice requires us to insert those struggles into the global plan of liberation that the church proclaims. In my pastoral letter I wrote, «The global plan of the liberation that God has for his people encompasses the whole of human reality in all its dimensions, including its openness to the absolute that is God himself. It therefore coincides with a definite conception of humanity, one that cannot be sacrificed to the needs of any short-term strategy, plan, or achievement»<sup>1</sup>. That means that the liberation that the church promotes cannot be limited to temporal practices.

Second, this liberation «is centered on the kingdom of God. Its mission is not limited just to the religious sphere; it reaffirms the primacy of humankind's spiritual vocation and proclaims salvation in Jesus Christ»<sup>2</sup>. «The primacy of the spiritual»—let's not forget that! As regards those who say that the church is preaching revolution and class hatred, it's a lie! I have explained it clearly: the church reaffirms the primacy of the spiritual and religious vocation of human beings, and she proclaims salvation in Jesus Christ.

Third, «This liberation proclaimed by the church proceeds from an evangelical vision of human reality, it is grounded in the profound motivation of justice and charity, it possesses a truly spiritual dimension, and its final objective is salvation and happiness with God»<sup>3</sup>. We say this to everyone, including those who belong to the people's political organizations: the salvation we should seek is not only better salaries, a better government, or a better situation on earth. We must also seek the supreme objective of salvation and happiness in God. Indeed, these are already possessed by those who practice this primacy of the spiritual, even if they live in earthly poverty.

For this reason, the liberation sought by the church «demands a conversion of heart and mind; it is not satisfied only with structural changes»<sup>4</sup>. What use is it to change structures, to change forms of government, to change modes of political organization if the people who are going to manage these structures still carry corruption in their hearts? What use is a change of our social situation if those of us living in the new structures are not ourselves inwardly renewed so as to be more just, more caring, truly new?

Finally, and I ask you to note this well, this liberation «excludes violence; it considers violence neither Christian nor evangelical; it views violence as ineffective and at odds with the dignity of the people»<sup>5</sup>. Violence is unworthy of us.

Here we can cite the words of the pope, who said that if the church, in supporting the liberating forces of the world, were to lose her global vision of Christian salvation, then «she would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would readily be prone to monopolization and manipulation. ... She would have no authority to proclaim freedom in the name of God» (EN 32)<sup>6</sup>. In other words, the Epiphany orients us with the star of the magi. It guides us with the clear perspective of God who wants to

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<sup>1</sup> *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978) 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

save all peoples. The liberation we seek cannot be defined only within earthly, temporal limits. While proclaiming true liberation, the church accompanies all human efforts at liberation; it encompasses all these earthly strivings and orients them toward salvation.

Therefore, dear sisters and brothers, the church's main interest is to provide direction for all these struggles. You should not, then, be surprised when the church supports good and noble causes even though these are embraced also by the so-called clandestine organizations. If what they are seeking is just, then it is the kingdom of God, but the church tells them, «Earthly intentions are not enough. You must envision that justice you're seeking within universal salvation, which means transcendent redemption and happiness in God». This is the great merit of the church, and that's why they want to destroy her and defame her: because she is preaching a liberating force that is absolute and unconditional. When the church preaches in defense of human rights, she does not take a political position. The political instances that today defend human rights can change tomorrow because politics is always changing, but the church, guided by her star, her transcendent perspective, will never change. And even if she's left all alone, she knows that she is with God and that God's transcendence illumines her in the same way that the bright radiance of God shone on Jerusalem, announcing to all, «The great liberation is at hand! Rise and shine, Jerusalem, for your light has come!» (Isa 60:1).

### **The Epiphany offers universal salvation**

In the second place, these Epiphany readings inspire in us a great missionary thought: the salvation that the Epiphany offers us today is a universal salvation. The image I have in my mind is this: all of us who have come here to Mass today in the cathedral and all of you who are gathered around your radio sets there, reflecting on the word—we are all part of a procession that began twenty centuries ago. Going first in the procession were the magi from the East, and after them came others, and then others. What the prophet Isaiah tells us today was being steadily fulfilled: «Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come bearing gold and frankincense, and proclaiming the praises of the Lord» (Isa 60:6). This is how poetic it is for us just to come to Mass! Let us never miss our Mass on Sunday for it is part of the procession of the magi on their way to worship Jesus; it is the procession of all nations who have discovered the universal salvation that God offers to all human beings.

In speaking of the magi, the gospel evokes those ancient names: Midian, Ephah, Sheba. They are regions near Persia, today's Iran, which is in the news now all over the world because of the great conflicts there. Those eastern lands were the first to be called by God. It was from Mesopotamia that God called Abraham, the first true believer. When Saint Matthew tells us about the magi from the mysterious East (Matt 2:1), he is certainly going back to the origins of faith in God. Abraham, by his faith, became the father of all who believe. From those lands came also the first Gentile believers, those who were not Jews. The important thing is not being children of Abraham, but having that faith which the magi from East had in their hearts.

Regarding the great revelation, we focus especially on the second reading, in which Saint Paul says, «By revelation was made known to me this mystery that had not been revealed before to humankind: that the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus» (Eph 3:3,5-6). This revelation is referring to us, dear sisters and brothers! Four centuries ago these lands on which the cathedral now stands

were forests inhabited by indigenous peoples. When the cross came and our native peoples began to worship it, this call going forth to all peoples found a response also here in Latin America. The bishops of Mexico, as the hosts of the great gathering of Latin American bishops that will begin in Puebla on January 27, have most thoughtfully published a joint pastoral letter<sup>7</sup>. In the letter they state that what is going to happen in Mexico this year started long ago, for it began when the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared at Tepeyac as a catechist, orienting the indigenous peoples toward the cross of Christianity. Mary has to be a part of the evangelization of this continent now and in the future because the Gospel then announced to our American peoples was in fulfillment of the command enunciated by Saint Paul: «This mystery that was hidden for long ages is now revealed to me: the Gentiles»—that is, the non-Jewish people, the Indians of America and all those countries of virgin mountains, all those who do not know Christ—«are now called to participate in his promise and his salvation. No one is excluded». (Eph 3:6).

Given that salvation is a universal reality, we do well to remember, sisters and brothers, that the evangelical and pastoral teaching of the Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the liberation that Christ brings leads humanity to complete fulfillment. Then, ten years ago at Medellín, this teaching became the pastoral approach of Latin America as well, even though many people unfortunately don't realize that. And now a new Medellín will be dawning in Puebla! By «complete fulfillment» we mean that it is the whole human reality that must be saved: soul and body, individual and society. That's what it means to establish God's kingdom on earth, a kingdom which is now so thwarted and manacled by our abusive idolatry of wealth and power. Those false idols must be overthrown, just as when the first evangelizers in the Americas overthrew the false gods our indigenous peoples were worshiping. Today the idols are different. They're called money, they're called political interests, they're called national security, but they're all forms of idolatry that seek to displace God from our altars. The church proclaims that we human beings can be happy only when, like the magi, we worship the one and only true God; we can be happy only by freeing ourselves from the false ideologies of «the Orient» and by worshiping this Christ with simple Christian faith and ever greater integrity.

I also want to remind you here about how, during the synod of 1974, Paul VI gathered the opinions of the modern magi, bishops who came from all over the world. The pope learned from those bishops about the sentiments of millions of people, and he later wrote these sad but eloquent words:

It is well known that many bishops from all the continents spoke about this at the last synod, especially bishops from the Third World; they spoke with a pastoral accent resonant with the voices of millions of the church's sons and daughters who make up those peoples. These peoples, as we know, have engaged all their energies in the effort and struggle to overcome everything that condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations, unfair commercial exchanges, and situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism that are sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The church, as the bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children; she has the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of

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<sup>7</sup> «The Presence of Mary of Guadalupe and the Evangelical Commitment of our Faith, a pastoral exhortation from the Bishop's Conference of Mexico on the occasion of the Puebla meeting, 15 August 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (10 December 1978).

giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization (EN 30).

These are the pope's words. They have nothing to do with communism. They state the demands of the Gospel. They announce what Isaiah announced, that the light of justice will shine on all the dark injustices of the world (Isa 60:1). They echo Paul's cry, that all men and women, Gentiles and Jews, will take part in this liberation of Christ (Eph 3:6). The magi were the first fruits, but that tiny stream has grown into a roaring river of humanity that is filling cathedrals like this one, people coming to worship the Lord and placing their faith and hope in Christ whose revelation has brought us the saving love of God.

My third point is that we need faith in order to make our own the love that God offers us, but before passing to that point, which will draw us near the altar to worship God in the Eucharist, I want to pause a moment to contemplate those magi bringing their symbolic gifts of incense, gold, and myrrh, for they also reflect our own history. Along with the gifts, the magi brought the pain, the anguish, the concrete concerns of their peoples, and they appealed for salvation to the only One who can save. Every Sunday, when I tell you about the concrete events of the week, I am nothing more than another poor worshiper of the Lord who is saying to him, «Lord, I bring you what our people produce, what comes out of these relations among us Salvadorans, both rich and poor, both leaders and governed». This is what we present to the Lord, and that's why you shouldn't resent my recounting of the week's events or see it as something reserved only for my homily. For me, of course, the main content of my poor homilies is the doctrine that I try to communicate. Today, for example, the main point that one should draw from this homily is that Jesus Christ is the epiphany or the manifestation of God's love for humankind. That is what I want all of us to take away with us today. But to live that doctrine in our concrete reality, we must not forget what is happening in our midst, both within the church and without.

### **Life of the church**

Beginning tomorrow, the priests of the archdiocese will spend this whole week discussing our priestly identity. In *Orientación* you'll find a good commentary about this<sup>8</sup>. In times of crisis people must ask themselves questions like «Who are we?» and «What is our role in the world?» If there are *any* people who have problems in these times of crisis, it is priests. In these days priests are either slandered and vilified or else they're praised and flattered to win them over. It is therefore necessary for the priests to consider who they are and who they are not. Recently the names of some priests were printed in flyers that were posted on walls of the city, as if they were guerrillas. It was ridiculous to see there men who are totally inoffensive. But what they forget—and I wish they'd also make this public!—is that there are also many priests who are involved in politics, but the politics of the ruling party! And they often even have ORDEN membership cards! About that the flyers say nothing. (Applause)

We priests should not incline toward any political party but rather be what we must be: priests among the people. Without fear we must immerse ourselves in the people's realities, as Christ immersed himself in the realities of his people, to the point of eating with sinners and associating with felons (Matt 9:11). This is what we must always do as priests. We are going to

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<sup>8</sup> «Margin Notes: Who I am» in *Orientación* (7 January 1979).

discuss such questions this week, and I ask your prayers for this week of priestly identity, which will begin tomorrow in San José de la Montaña Seminary.

I also have a sad note regarding priests this week: the death of our beloved Franciscan Father Nilo Cuchiaro. He was in charge of the seminary in Los Planes de Renderos for a long time and then was transferred to Zacatecoluca. As you saw in the papers, he drowned in the sea<sup>9</sup>. He was Italian, and he had given us his life. To help us he had left his homeland and his family. We are the community that receives his remains, so it is only right for us to pray for him and to accompany the Franciscan Fathers in their loss. We are very grateful to them.

From another priest, Father Antonio Pocasangre, I received this painful telegram: «Deeply disturbed. Sacrilegious thefts continue. Chalice was robbed». In Panchimalco they robbed a chalice, and the priest is doing everything possible to recover it. I ask for your help because it's a treasure of that colonial church, and it would be a shame to lose it.

Some more news about our priests: tomorrow evening at seven-thirty in the Miramonte church we'll celebrate Mass with several priests for the eternal rest of the mother of Father Rogelio, pastor of Zacamil. We again extend our condolences to him.

Still another note about priests: the change of pastors in Assumption parish in Mejicanos will be today at five in the afternoon. Father Manuel Barrera, who has guided that parish with much success, wants to take some time off. Taking his place will be Father Samuel Orellana and Father Octavio Ortiz. I want to take this opportunity to thank Father Barrera publicly for his generous and noble service, and I also wish the new pastor much success in the parish.

As I continue to visit the communities, on Thursday I was in the parish of Concepción Quezaltepeque in Chalatenango. In the village of La Junta there had been a sacrilegious theft of the Blessed Sacrament, so we made an act of reparation, which was very impressive. I want to congratulate Father Eduardo Alas, the missionary Carmelite Sisters from Spain who are helping him, and the catechists—they've truly helped to make the community there a very lively and fervent one. This eucharistic event will no doubt contribute to even greater fervor in that parish. Among the letters the campesinos gave me, I found one that ended with these words: «Give a warm greeting to our beloved Holy Father, you who are going to Puebla». This note from the catechists gives me a strong sense of how strong is the love for the pope among our people. I think that's one of the characteristics of our communities: their deep affection for the pope.

On Friday I was also in San José Villanueva, where the Passionist Sisters and Father Benito Tovar have developed a wonderful group of lay people as pastoral ministers. Their pastoral work is in complete agreement with the guidelines of the archdiocese. Yesterday in Apopa we celebrated the confirmation of some young people and held a very lively meeting of pastoral agents, led by Father Óscar Martell. I want to let you know that these confirmations of youngsters are awakening a true sense of the real value of this sacrament, and that is what we want.

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<sup>9</sup> *El Diario de Hoy* (4 January 1979).



In the community of Apulo I received a beautiful Christmas offering from the *campesinos*, who have deprived themselves of many things in order to give this gift to their sisters and brothers, especially those who are in prison. I thank them and let them know that their offering is already on its way to the prisoners. So many delightful things happen at Christmas in the world of the poor. For example, a woman from Los Planes de Olocuilta gave me a donation with the words: «For the children who are orphans this Christmas». I've also received letters that give marvelous explanations of the meaning of these feast days. For many people they are an occasion for joy and extravagance, but for others they are full of pain and anguish. Consider the holiday of a gardener, for example. Who thinks about the work a gardener does? He works from dawn to dusk and then often has to help out at a party until three o'clock in the morning. Another letter came from some night watchmen who had to spend their Christmas protecting a property from danger. I ask you to keep all these forgotten people in mind for they are really our great benefactors and our brothers.

This evening at six o'clock the community of Holy Family parish in Colonia Centroamérica will be celebrating their patronal feast. The community of San Martín received the gift of a ciborium from Colonia Luz and Colonia Montserrat to replace the one that was stolen; they sent a nice letter thanking them for the ciborium, which was given as a sign of fraternity.

I want to let you know, dear sisters and brothers, that on Friday this week, January 12, the National Commission for Justice and Peace will be here in the cathedral to celebrate a Mass at seven in the evening. The papal nuncio and all the bishops of the republic have been invited. Bishop Rivera, as president of bishops' social commission, will present the peace message for 1979, just as the pope has offered it for the whole world.

I want to ask your prayers also for the spiritual preparations that are underway for the coming Week of Christian Unity. This ecumenical week will be celebrated around the world from January 18 to 25. During these days both Catholics and Protestants beg God for the precious gift of unity so that the world will be able to behold a Christianity that is not divided but is, as Christ said, «one flock under one shepherd» (John 10:16).

We also join in the fervor of the novenas to our Lord of Esquipulas, which are being held mainly in San Bartolomé Perulapía, in Colón, and in Aguilares. From the newspaper we also learned that they're honoring the Black Christ of Esquipulas in the Central Market<sup>10</sup>. I only want to warn you that it's fine that we honor Christ, because he deserves all the love we can give him, but it would be very bad if we did so out of a sense of rivalry and even worse if we did it for economic advantage and to seek ways to collect more money. (That's why they make comparisons about not spending money on trips to Esquipulas and so on.) But people are free. People seek the devotions they like, but it would be terrible if we gave economic overtones to a devotion as wonderful as the crucified Christ.

I want to announce to you also that, in order to improve the distribution of our publications, an office will be opened on the west side of this cathedral, and there you'll be able to find the pastoral letters, church documents, *Orientación*, etc. Even today you'll find they're selling the annexes for the pastoral letter that many people have been asking for; you can find them there after you leave the cathedral.

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<sup>10</sup> *El Diario de Hoy* (5 January 1979).

I'm also delighted to tell you that, thanks to the efforts of some good Catholics, the homilies pronounced here in the cathedral are going to be edited and published<sup>11</sup>. The first one is ready and will be coming out soon; it's the homily for the First Sunday of Advent.

While our local church is described in what we've said already, we also have to see the church on a more universal level; in that regard we find news that gives us consolation and strength. This week, for example, we read in the newspapers that the pope has condemned the crime of abortion three times in one week, and he has also deplored divorce<sup>12</sup>. We also read that the pope is being attacked by the Italian press and television for defending Christian morality in this delicate matter. So you see, being condemned by the world is a general rule when the apostle seeks to do his duty. The newspaper even stated that the pope has been receiving less applause from the people because he's going over old matters that the people have moved beyond<sup>13</sup>. That's a lie. Matrimonial fidelity and the morality of preserving the life that begins in the womb of a woman are ancient themes, not new ones, and the church must defend them even if it means losing applause and being attacked by the public.

All the same, you should take note that the church is also concerned about political matters. Surely everyone has read in the papers about the cardinal who has been sent by the pope to mediate in the conflict that has arisen between Chile and Argentina<sup>14</sup>.

Other news of continental import is the bishops' meeting in Puebla, which will soon be convening and for which we ask your prayers. The secretary general, Archbishop López Trujillo, stated clearly, «Puebla should be an effort to seek unity in charity and in truth»<sup>15</sup>. We should be consoled by this: Puebla is not about seeking personal advantage or backing certain ideological currents; it's about seeking the truth. What does God want for the church in Latin America? That is the main concern that should animate the prayers of all the faithful and the work of the bishops who will have the honor of taking part in the Puebla meeting. As you all know, the pope will be there. What is truly wonderful is that his coming has stirred interest in traveling to see him, even from a distance. When it was known that he would make a stopover in the Dominican Republic, large pilgrimages were organized from all the Caribbean islands to go there to watch the pope pass by—and of course, he'll stop to greet his children. In Guadalajara and other cities of Mexico that he'll visit, preparations are being made as if for a true epiphany. As we said at the beginning of this homily, this is the visit of a sovereign, the supreme pastor of the church. Blessed be God that the pope, as an emblem of this church, is always in people's minds, is always news!

## Events of the week

Now for a report about this week we've gone through, dear sisters and brothers. We want to inform you that one of the kidnapped men, Mr. Schuitema of Holland, was set free. You

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<sup>11</sup> The reference is to the first edition of Archbishop Romero's homilies, which were published and distributed each week in pamphlets with the title, *Sentir con la Iglesia. Voz y pensamiento de Monseñor Óscar A. Romero* [Feeling with the Church. Words and Thoughts of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero].

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, «Homily in the Roman Church of the Gesù», 31 December 1978, and «Homily in the General Audience», 3 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (7 January 1979).

<sup>13</sup> *El Diario de Hoy* (3 & 4 December 1979).

<sup>14</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 & 6 January 1979).

<sup>15</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (6 January 1979).

probably have read his statements or heard them on the radio. It's interesting that he reports that he ate chicken, and they even gave him whiskey to drink<sup>16</sup>. Would that all the disappeared persons and the poor prisoners dying of hunger could also say that they were not being treated inhumanely!

Meanwhile, the two Englishmen and Mr. Suzuki remain in captivity. The FARN insists on asking for the liberation of five political prisoners as a condition for the release of the Englishmen. The FARN asked the Human Rights Commission, which is presently mediating, to include me as a member<sup>17</sup>. Consequently, I have now been added to that commission, and I will do everything possible to collaborate in my role as pastor. I emphasize this: my position as pastor obliges me to be in solidarity with all those who are suffering and to support every effort on behalf of human freedom and dignity. In my role as pastor, then, I have gladly joined with the Human Rights Commission for this work of freeing the kidnapped persons. And precisely as pastor I wish to renew my plea for the relief of the suffering of those families. I ask those who can resolve this conflict, which can end tragically, to do everything possible to resolve it peacefully since human lives are at stake, and human life should trump all legality since any legality is also human. We also regret that Doctor Manuel Antonio Bonilla is still being held captive although nothing is known of who is guilty of his detention. Amnesty International has also asked the FARN to free the men they hold kidnapped.

The Human Rights Commission has requested a general amnesty and the repeal of the Law of Public Order. The same request had already been made by the CUTS, ANDES, the Committee for the Liberation of Political Prisoners, and the political parties PDC and MNR. This is a cry of the people, and it is also an international cry. Many letters are arriving through Amnesty International in support of this petition. The secrecy and the silence with which these cries are met is amazing. An affirmative response would surely encourage us to believe that the situation of our people was getting better.

The mothers of the disappeared persons for whom ransom is being requested wrote a letter to the president's wife asking her to intervene. Maybe this woman's heart, which by nature is more compassionate, can bring about a favorable solution to this difficult situation.

The Year of the Child began on Saturday<sup>18</sup>. Let us remember that, along with the child, we should especially keep in mind responsible fatherhood and motherhood. The child is helpless and can do nothing except with the help of his parents and other adults. That's why our celebration of the Year of the Child, as *Orientación* states well<sup>19</sup>, should be above all a call to the conscience of adults. Let us hope that in this Year of the Child men will be more responsible fathers. If some people deplore the population explosion among our people, it is because of all the immorality and licentiousness; there is tremendous irresponsibility in the way some men and women exercise the parenthood that is incumbent upon them. It is not right to bring children into the world if those little ones invited into life are not assured bread to eat.

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<sup>16</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 January 1979).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> The United Nations declared 1979 the «International Year of the Child».

<sup>19</sup> *Orientación* (7 January 1979).

We also want to denounce that Doctor Lara Velado and Doctor Manuel Ungo have been threatened with death if anything tragic should happen to the kidnapped men<sup>20</sup>. Let us avoid all further shedding of blood. Let us hope that these warnings are no more than idle threats, just as I think rumors are behind the warning I received this week to walk very carefully because someone is out to kill me. I trust in the Lord, and I know that the ways of Providence protect those who try to serve him.

Regarding the labor conflicts of workers and *campesinos*, we regret that so many complaints of injustice are still arriving. I'm not going to dwell on these now, but I will submit them to our media, which are publicizing complaints that are well founded, the ones that aren't just baseless grievances but have their proofs and their witnesses.

We are saddened by the situation in Nicaragua. We fear that on January 11, the anniversary of the death of Doctor Chamorro, things may get worse. Let us pray earnestly to the Lord that peace return to our sister country.

Let us offer a prayer also that the meeting of the leaders of England, the United States, France, and West Germany will yield results that will be of benefit to the world, since these are extremely influential countries in the history of our world.

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, let us gather all these events together, along with all that could be said about the history of every family here present and all that could be said about the suffering and anguish of every person. The church brings all of this together now in the ceremony of the offertory, in order to offer it on the altar of God and to unite it with the sacrifice of Christ.

### **Through faith we share in God's love and salvation**

The final thought of my homily is that every human life—in the concrete history of our people, our families, the people of El Salvador or any country—is called to redemption but still needs to fulfill the one condition of faith.

We are going to conclude our series of reflections this morning with this thought from the Second Vatican Council: «The obedience of faith is to be given to God who reveals, an obedience by which one commits one's whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to the God who reveals» (DV 5). This means that faith is not just believing truths with one's mind; faith also involves the obedient submission of one's feelings. The obedience of faith means responding to God as Abraham did when God told him, «Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and travel to a land I will show you» (Gen 12:1). Abraham's act of faith meant leaving his relatives and traveling to wherever God directed him. Faith means throwing yourself into empty space, but knowing that God's hands are there to catch you; it means braving dangers, but knowing that a powerful hand is there to protect you. That is faith. Faith, then, is not just believing with the head; it is committing yourself with all your heart and all your life.

So what did the magi do when they saw God's invitation communicated to them in the language of the star? They followed, and they obeyed the call. It's a marvelous thing to behold

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<sup>20</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (5 January 1979).

the magi on their knees before the child Jesus, offering him gold, incense, and myrrh. It is the beautiful expression of people who have faith. We find ourselves before a mystery, and believing is not just a matter of saying «Two plus two make four—that's the way it is, and it can't be any other way!» When there is clear evidence, then there is no need to believe. Believing is when they tell the magi, «That poor little child in Bethlehem is the Son of God». Now that's a mystery! There is nothing evident about that! That is something that people can doubt. Such are the conflicts of faith. Dear sisters and brothers, don't be frightened by conflicts of faith. For example, when you see the church with all her sins and stains, you ask: how can she be the spouse of Christ? Doubts arise, the test of faith. But it is then that the person of faith makes the commitment: «Because God has said so—that's why I believe».

That explains why the Council goes on to say something that should not be forgotten: «To make this act of faith, the grace of God and the interior help of the Holy Spirit must precede and assist, moving the heart and turning it to God, opening the eyes of the mind and giving joy and ease to everyone in assenting to the truth and believing it. To bring about an ever deeper understanding of revelation the same Holy Spirit constantly brings faith to completion by his gifts» (DV 5). We are not alone in this act of throwing ourselves into God's hands. Deep within us are the grace and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift. Let us thank God for it. Coming to Mass to worship God is a voluntary offering of faith. There is nothing evident about coming to Mass, like «two plus two make four». There are bound to be doubts and difficulties, but in the midst of those very difficulties you have the grace of God, who helps you to move beyond doubting whatever is not evident. Faith is an offering of the understanding and the heart to the God who reveals himself, to the God who loves us and reveals himself to us, to the God whom we can refuse nothing.

Dear sisters and brothers, let us pass now to the altar, and let us experience the beauty of these reflections on the Epiphany. In Christ there is an Epiphany. In Christ God reveals to humankind his love and his saving power. Let it be so. (Applause)