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Through Mary God Wants to Save in History

Fourth Sunday of Advent

23 December 1979

Micah 5:2-5

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45

Dear sisters and brothers, four seminarians have just now been called to receive what are called «ministries», consisting of two kinds of authorizations that the church confers upon members of her people who are going to serve as lectors and acolytes. These four young men are an image of a church that desires to serve, for ministry means service.

But alongside them are the central figures of this Fourth Sunday of Advent, two pregnant women, Elizabeth and Mary, who are clothing these men in tender strength and pastoral love. The two women were miraculously made fertile. Elizabeth, who was elderly and sterile, was now six months pregnant and was going to be the mother of the precursor. And Mary had just conceived by work of the Holy Spirit, without losing her virginity, the child who would be born in Bethlehem as the Redeemer of humankind. She is the magnificent figure of Advent.

We can pay great honor to women by saying that every pregnant woman is Advent, for she announces the arrival of new life. So how could the church ever degrade or offend the dignity of women? To the contrary, she exalts that dignity and extols it. She wants to defend it against everything that offends it and makes it less noble.

During Advent we are presented with these two figures: the pregnant Mary, who was to be the mother of Jesus, and the church herself, who is bringing forth abundant children. Like the virgin mother Mary, the church is preparing to give birth in eternity, in the definitive church of heaven. These two figures inspire in the hearts of all Christians a great desire to prepare for Christmas, when we celebrate both God's life entering into human life and the second coming of Jesus, when he will come in the splendor of his glory to consummate the definitive church. Between these two Advents, these two arrivals of life, Christianity moves and has its being. Mary had an exceptional role in the first coming of Christ, but her mission did not end there. Throughout the long history of Christianity, Mary has always accompanied the ministries of the church, including the labors of her apostles, her bishops, her priests, her catechists, her religious, the parents of families, and all those who have been creating church in the course of the centuries. Mary is the mother of all the fertile ground that we humble ministers of the Gospel attempt to cultivate and make prosper among the people.

On this Sunday, therefore, as we make manifest the church's sense of service by commissioning these four young men, let us renew our affection for the Virgin and let us proclaim her, with the words of Puebla, «the Star of evangelization that continually renews the church» (P 303).

The title we are going to give to this homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent is this: «Through Mary God Wants to Save in History». The three usual reflections will be these: first, Jesus is the salvation of God in history; second, through Mary we have Jesus; and third, Mary continues to be the sign of God's salvation for all ages.

Jesus is the salvation of God in history

First, then, Jesus is the salvation of God in history. The gospel tells us that the fruit of Mary's womb was to be given a name imposed by God himself. Joseph was commanded, «You will give him the name Jesus» (Matt 1:21), a name that in Hebrew means «God saves». Jesus is just that: «God saving». He is God's salvation who became a child in Bethlehem and was crucified on Calvary. Through the church the life of Jesus is prolonged in history. He will save people from their sins. The Puebla document says something interesting about Mary: «She is the culminating point of history joined with heaven, and she brings God's life to humankind» (P 301). In today's gospel Mary is presented as filled with this salvation that has already come and is found within her womb. That's why the sanctification of John the Baptist occurred as soon as Mary arrived at the house of her cousin Elizabeth, even before he was born: «At the moment your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy» (Luke 1:44b). John the Baptist was born without sin because he was sanctified when God's salvation arrived at his own house in the womb of Mary. Elizabeth, called Mary «the mother of my Lord» (Luke 1:44a). How marvelous must have been the encounter between these two women! The gospel says that Elizabeth greeted Mary with the words: «Blessed are you for believing because what the Lord has told you will be fulfilled» (Luke 1:45). What has the Lord told Mary? He revealed to her his project of salvation.

The salvation we preach in Christ's church is the same as that in which Mary believed. It is the salvation she initiated when she gave her consent and became pregnant with God's salvation. That is why the church zealously preserves the same faith Mary had in God's project of saving all humankind, and that is why she will not allow it to be confused with other, merely human projects. God's project sanctifies all and permeates all. Every effort to liberate the world's peoples will be effective and in accord with God's heart only if it allows itself to be penetrated by faith in God's project to save humankind. These are propitious times for congratulating Mary. Let us listen to her so she can tell us what God wants by way of the liberation of our country and our people. Let us not be seduced by false kinds of liberation. Rather, let us always be the prolongation in history of God's salvation, which arrived in Mary's womb and which by Mary's faith gives life to all the saving efforts of earth.

This Sunday's prophet, Micah, refers to this saving project of God when he says, «His origin is from of old, from ancient times». In recalling that antiquity, the prophet mentions the birthplace of David: «And you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are not the least of the clans because from you shall come forth one who is to rule over my people Israel» (Micah 5:2). This is an initiative of God! In that humble village of Bethlehem, the birthplace of David, there was to be born a descendant of his, one who would bring about the salvation that God desires for humankind. From that dynasty of David would be born the King of our faith, the one whom we follow with true faith.

The nature of this work of liberation is described in today's first reading, which tells us that «because of their sins the people were handed over to enslavement on earth until the time

when she who is to give birth has borne her child» (Micah 5:3). This is another wonderful allusion to Mary. Just thirty years earlier, the great prophet Isaiah had stood before King Ahaz, who was trembling with fear at the imminent invasion by Assyria, and offered him a sign that God was with his people: «A virgin shall conceive and bear a child while remaining still a virgin» (Isa 7:14). This was God's marvelous sign of the salvation that is now being accomplished. When the expecting woman is ready to give birth this coming Christmas, it will be the time the prophet announced, the time when all humankind will be freed of every form of slavery.

How hopeful this message should sound for our Salvadoran nation even though many people feel glum about this coming Christmas! If God is with us, why are we glum? If she who is to give birth is once again reminding us that on this Christmas Eve she gave birth to the salvation that God desires, how can we be fearful? The night of hope draws near—the night when she who is to give birth brings forth her child and puts an end to all earthly slavery. As the prophet announces, the people who were enslaved under the tyrannical power of idols, passions, and sinfulness «will live securely because his greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth» (Micah 5:4b). The prophet proclaims a universal kingdom in which salvation is offered to all those who desire it with a sincere heart.

Of the child who is to be born of this mysterious woman this prophecy of Micah says, «He shall be our peace». (Micah 5:5a). He is peace! Why is there no peace on earth? It is because people are distant from God and because hatred makes people distant from one another. Christ is peace because he brings God and people together and because he calls all of us to embrace one another fraternally. This is the salvation Christ brings.

In today's second reading we find the explanation of why Christ is the Redeemer, that is, why Jesus is the salvation of the world. Consider how the letter to the Hebrews describes this Christmas night when God enters history: «When Christ entered the world he said, "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me. Here I am, I have come to do your will". By this "will" we have been consecrated through the offering of the body of Jesus once and for all» (Heb 10:5,9-10). This means that the child born of Mary is the flesh that God needs for a holocaust offering. The world began to be saved from the very moment that «the Word became flesh» (John 1:14). The salvation of the world began in the womb of Mary, it was consummated on the cross of Calvary, and it became manifest when Jesus triumphed over death and was glorified in heaven. This, then, is the circuit of salvation: «I came from the Father and submitted myself to the humiliation of death. Now I return again to the Father, bringing with me the salvation of humankind». This is the saving project of Christ, and it takes the form of what theologians call kenosis, which means the humbling of the one who, although he is God, divests himself of divine rank in order to become human. But even more, he suffered injustice in his own flesh and was executed, offering to God the holocaust of his suffering so that all who believe in him will be saved. Mary is the source of the flesh of the Son of God who by the will of the Father offers the holocaust of the cross, the sacrifice that saves the world.

Having this knowledge of God's project of salvation, sisters and brothers, we can say that, starting from that moment, there could be no true liberation in history unless it was incorporated into the great liberation that God has destined for all people. All liberation that does not carry deep within itself the project of God is false liberation. All liberation that does not arise from faith in Christ's salvation yields a salvation that is mutilated, a merely temporal, political, economic salvation. As ideal as some form of liberation may seem, if it is not

embedded in Christ's salvation, which frees us from sin and raises us up to God, then we cannot say it is the integral salvation that God desires.

This letter of Saint Paul goes so far as to state that any religion that disregards the project of God will do little to liberate people. In the letter to the Hebrews he says clearly that «God did not delight in the sacrifices or the holocausts of the temple» (Heb 10:8) because they failed to convey the depths of Christ's surrender for the salvation of humankind. Here Paul is denouncing a false religious spirit. It is no use for us to offer lots of prayers and penances to God if we don't have a profound sense of how God wants us to be liberated from human enslavement or if we don't become part of Christ's great surrender. For despite being rich, Christ became poor; divesting himself of everything, he humbled himself to the cross, thus giving a sacrificial and salvific meaning to our Christian religion (2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:8). As we reflect this morning on how salvation is to be found only in Jesus, let us hope that we will discern whether our own religion truly worships the real Christ, or whether we haven't instead mystified him so that we worship some Christ who is not God's authentic salvation. May Mary, by her faith, teach us to recognize what true salvation is.

Through Mary we have Jesus

Therefore, my second reflection is this: through Mary we have Jesus. The Puebla document presents God's project of salvation to us with this beautiful expression: «Through Mary, God became flesh and formed part of a people, thus marking the center of human history. Mary is the connecting link between heaven and earth. Without Mary the Gospel becomes disincarnate and disfigured; it gets transformed into ideology and spiritualistic rationalism» (P 301). It is Mary, then, who gives redemption the meaning that God wants it to have.

Today's gospel places on the lips of Elizabeth a greeting that is valid for all ages. The long-awaited one was now the fruit of Mary's bosom: «Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb» (Luke 1:42). Even the pagans had some premonitions about the arrival of this admirable woman. For example, in one of the poems of the Roman poet Virgil, which seems almost like a prophecy of Isaiah, these words are spoken to the child of a mysterious woman: *Incipe, parve puer, risum cognoscere matris*¹. «Begin, small child, to know your mother's smile».

Mary is a mother who is blessed for she engages all that is human and embraces all the needs of humanity. When Mary received the angel's message and assented to be the mother of the Savior, she made herself responsible for all humankind. That fiat, «May it be done to me according to your word» (Luke 1:38), is not pronounced only by that young girl of Nazareth; it is the anguished cry of all the peoples who need redemption. We could even say that this crisis of frightening disarray that El Salvador is experiencing in 1979 was already present with all its anguish on the trembling lips of Mary: «Behold the handmaid. Come to save this people. El Salvador needs you. History needs you. The nations need you. Come!» Mary, then, is the one who gives birth to the mysterious being whom God has promised as a sign of his omnipotence, as a sign of his salvation.

¹ The Fourth Eclogue of Virgil reads, *Incipe, parve puer, risu cognoscere matrem*, which means, «Begin, small child, to know your mother through her smile».

As today's second reading tells us, when Christ entered into history, he said to God, «You have prepared for me a body, and this body will be the true holocaust that you need» (Heb 10:5). And there we have Mary giving him a living human body. Just as every mother gives human life to her child, so Mary gives full humanity to this child who at the same time is the Son of God, so that he can bear all human responsibility in his members and purify humanity with his blood which, since it belongs to God, is divine blood bringing God's redemption.

Sisters and brothers, this is the great mystery to which theology has given a name that is rather strange but that expresses the full depth of the mystery: human nature and the nature of the divine Word are united together in what is called the *hypostatic* union. The word «hypostatic» means «personal». The union happens in a single person, the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Word. Thus, the Word does not have only the divine nature of God; he also has a human nature that allows him to say, «My hands are God's. My weeping is God's. My tears are God's. My blood is God's». The personhood of Jesus is divine not human. According to theology, in Jesus there is only one person, the divine person, the same divine person who has possessed a divine nature from all eternity. Now the divine person takes on a new, human nature from the bosom of a woman and becomes like every human being. This personal or *hypostatic* union is the secret of our salvation. Therefore, I repeat, no one can be saved except by passing through the *hypostasis* of Jesus, the person of Jesus, by faith in the Lord.

We should pray to the Virgin this morning that all those who are working for the liberation of people not draw away from this faith. Let them feel that this faith gives them true greatness and their true destiny, the beginning and the end of all that God wants for our happiness. Let us pray that there be no earthly ambitions except those that come from God. Let us pray that we, far from drawing away from the salvific movement of Christ, may realize that no one is more generous in saving the people than God in his Christ. Only God become human can give us the true meaning of the freedom for which we work and for which we die.

Mary continues to be the sign of God's salvation for all ages

Finally, sisters and brothers, here is my third reflection: Mary continues to be the sign of salvation for all ages. That moment of Mary's giving birth has passed, and we will commemorate it on Christmas Eve, but God has desired to identify Mary with his church. As the mother of our spiritual life, she is vitally concerned to see God's life becoming incarnate in all men and women. Mary is the mother not only of the physical Christ but also of the historical Christ. Mary considers Christ to be the head of the mystical body, which is all of us. As long as even one person remains to be born into divine life, Mary is still expecting, as is the church, waiting to give birth. The childbearing of Mary and the church continues until the consummation of the world.

When they say that these tremendous times our country is now going through are a time of giving birth, they are not telling lies or using figures of speech. It is true. In history there are times of travail for the peoples, times when bringing forth new life is difficult. A new child is to be born, a new country is to be born—a country dear to the heart of God. Without realizing it, we are all collaborating in this painful childbirth. Let us hope that we do so with faith in the historical destiny that God has ordained. Mary knows what this destiny is, and that's why we are slowly attaining the state that Paul describes: «Christ offered his body in a holocaust once and for all, and his act sanctifies those who were redeemed by him» (Heb

10:10). What this means is that the saving act was consummated on Calvary and in the resurrection, but the application of this mystery to the world's salvation has been the work of the church in the course of the centuries.

What I am doing right now, what future priests will do in their ministry, what the church is doing today by means of her pastoral work—all this is nothing else than making the sacrifice of Christ germinate in the heart of every person. It means converting the unbelieving, increasing the faith of those who already believe, sanctifying those who are already holy. This work never ends.

I would like all of us who form the church to have a clear idea of this mission that God has given to us of transforming the world, an idea so clear that we don't have to go begging before secular political projects. Rather, we should try to understand them and tell them with genuine affection, «What you are doing to bring forth a new country is not enough if it doesn't involve the sanctification of all Salvadorans. Let us join together all our efforts of liberation so that the church, as a mother pregnant with the life of God coming into the world, can guide them toward the true development of God's children».

My purpose in writing the fourth pastoral letter was to show what the church can offer the country and to avoid any misinterpretations in that regard. I want all who belong to the church to know what it is that we can and should offer and what we cannot and should not offer. One of the things we can give to the life of the country is this prolific life of God. «The most tender and beautiful aspect of the church's contribution to El Salvador is Mary, the mother of Christ, the mother of the church, the mother of America. Puebla has beautifully interpreted Mary's role in the liberating work of the church and her providential presence in the devotion of our peoples»².

What I just quoted is the pope's reflection on how devotion to Mary is for Latin America «a vital historical experience that is part of the very identity of these peoples» (P 283)³. Because of the beautiful feasts of the Virgin occurring in this month of December, we recall her now as «the strong woman who knew poverty and suffering, flight and exile—situations that cannot escape the attention of those who wish to reinforce with evangelical spirit the liberating energies of individuals and society» (P 302)⁴.

We also recall how Mary in her canticle, which we heard in today's gospel, «reveals herself as a model for those who refuse to submit passively to adverse circumstances in their personal and social lives. Such persons are not victims of "alienation", as they say these days, but rather proclaim with Mary that God "lifts up the lowly" and if necessary "brings the mighty down from their thrones"» (Luke 1:52) (P 297)⁵. Devotion to Mary, therefore, is not something feeble and sentimental. Mary is teaching us about God's project and the part he wants us to play in it.

On this Sunday that we have so lovingly dedicated to the Virgin, I would like all of us who are reflecting together as Christians to know how sweet and powerful is this experience of

² *The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis* (6 August 1979) 99.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

devotion to Mary. By leading us away from conformity and alienation, as the pope just reminded us⁶, Mary knows how to give to suffering, exile, and oppression their true meaning, which has nothing to do with desperation, violence, hatred, or vengeance. Rather, their true meaning is found in the redemption of Christ who declares, «You gave me a body so that I could offer it to you in holocaust» (Heb 10:5). Christ is the salvation of the world. What we are experiencing now is the salvation and the project of God, and we would like to experience it even more intensely.

Life of the church

So in light of these reflections, dear sisters and brothers, let us review this week, and in light of our evangelical and Marian reflection, let us also celebrate the advancement of these young men to ministries which bring them closer to the priesthood. As our church experiences the concrete realities today here in El Salvador and in our archdiocese, she wants to be first of all a child of Mary; she wants to prolong Jesus' project of God's salvation in history.

Last Monday we attended a beautiful Christmas gathering with the Cursillistas of Christianity and their two new groups. We thank God that this Cursillo of Christianity movement has developed into a great legion of Christians who are totally committed to God's salvation in the world. Those who haven't understood this have left the movement, but there are many who have realized that their becoming better Christians through Cursillos is part of salvation history. So there they are, thank God, a valiant group on whom we can rely.

Last Tuesday in our clergy meeting we discussed the theme of Christmas, and we also sincerely and courageously evaluated our team ministry. As we came to the end of that wonderful reflection and lively celebration, I invited our dear priests to experience in their own lives the double mystery of Christmas. First, there is the mystery of immanence: God becoming man, taking to himself the realities of history, and braving the ebb and flow of the world in order to sanctify them. And then there is the mystery of transcendence: a God who plunges into history in order to transcend history by the force of his innermost being. If we live our faith this way—as priests, as communities, as church, as God's immanence in history, and as history's transcendence toward God—then we are fulfilling our saving mission, the salvation project of Jesus.

We also had a beautiful experience celebrating the Virgin of Los Remedios in the village of San Laureano. There we sanctified several married couples and fortified a group of young people with confirmation.

Similarly in San José Quezaltepeque there was a lovely confirmation ceremony and evidence of a very lively church. The true pastor there, Father Roberto, and the two religious communities are working together very well. We rejoice and thank God that the divisions that have so disrupted the tranquility of Quezaltepeque are coming to an end.

We also celebrated the patronal feast of Santo Tomás. I couldn't do it personally, but Monsignor López did it in my name.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily at the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Zapopán in Guadalajara», 30 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (11 February 1979).

The church also made its presence felt in the village of La Esperanza of San Pedro Perulapán by means of the archbishop's representative, the pastors, and the vicar of that place. It is a village that has suffered greatly and now feels terrorized by armed leftist forces. The village has had bad luck: terrorized before by government forces and now by forces of the left. The effect is the same: fear and anguish for all those families. In the name of peace and justice, I tell those who are now threatening the village: respect the peace of those homes.

This afternoon we will bless the new church of El Calvario in Cojutepeque.

Bishop Rivera and Monsignor Urioste returned from their successful solidarity journey to Holland, Belgium, and Germany. They found there great solidarity, wonderful kindness, and much generosity for our archdiocese. I thank them, and I also thank those communities that show us such benevolence.

The many members of Opus Dei in our diocese will be very pleased with the letter I received from their presiding officer, Bishop Álvaro del Portillo. The letter reads as follows: «The members and associates of Opus Dei there as in other places, thank God, are working with a firm purpose, motivated only by a desire to serve the church. I know the affection they have for you and the fidelity with which they observe the spirit of our work, which leads us to reaffirm the orientations of the bishop in all the dioceses where we work and to "haul the wagon", as our founder once stated, in the same direction as the diocesan prelate». I am very happy, therefore, that the efforts of Opus Dei are not running parallel to or on the edges of our archdiocesan pastoral ministry but are in full accord with it. We hope that their work bears out this orientation given them by the presiding prelate of Opus Dei.

I also received a telegram requesting prayers for the golden anniversary of the priestly ordination of Father Genaro Godoy in the diocese of Santa Ana. In these days he is celebrating fifty years of priesthood. May the Lord fill him with graces and holiness.

I also want to let you know, with fraternal affection, that these homilies are being collected and published in weekly pamphlets thanks to the patient and intelligent work of María Julia Hernández. She has already completed a year's worth, and she was kind enough to give me a bound copy, in three volumes, of the homilies for the whole year up to Advent. They are available to all those who want a complete collection of the homilies of the 1979 liturgical year.

I also want to greet all our Salvadoran radio announcers, who celebrated their special day on December 20. I heard on the radio a conversation between two announcers, and I was delighted by it because among other things one said to the other: «Congratulations today, but let's not forget Article 17». I then learned that Article 17 is the regulation that prohibits the denigration of persons. How good it is for announcers to be mindful, on their special day, of the great power of the microphone and the mass media in general. The greatest sin is failing to use the mass media to communicate information and truth and instead taking advantage of them to distort the truth into untruth. May God grant that this conversation between the two announcers reveal the spirit with which the mass media in our country are used. (Applause)

Now, raising our eyes to the universal church, you'll be happy to know, as I was, that Pope John Paul II has been named as the most prominent figure of 1979 according to a survey

carried out by newspapers and radio and TV stations⁷. He is number one among notable persons of the year because of his journeys to six countries, his participation in the conference of Latin American bishops, his visit to the United Nations, and his messages to world leaders in which he spoke on behalf of peace, human rights, and dispossessed persons. He is known as the «traveling» pope because of the hundred hours he has spent in the air.

The pope will be very active during Christmas. Filled with hope and faith, let us be united with him in Christmas spirit. If we are unfortunate enough to have our Christmas taken away from us, as is being threatened, let us be aware that no power can take joy, peace, and light away from the hearts of those who realize that Jesus is not born in the midst of worldly delights but in the tribulation of a people in need of salvation.

The bishops of Poland have censured the communist system precisely because it does not allow itself to be evaluated; it thwarts objective assessments and solutions. I say this for the sake of those who may feel eager to adopt a communist regime. Take a look first at the experience of other countries.

Events of the week

Let us now move on from the life of our church and the light of this Christmas message and consider the contrasts we find in our nation. On the one side there are death, hatred, vengeance, bloodshed, violence, and suffering; on the other there are some timid rays of hope urging us to be like the Messiah, of whom Isaiah says, «Let us not snuff out the wick that is still flickering; let us not break the reed that is bent» (Isa 42:3). As faithful followers of Jesus, let us keep hope alive wherever it is found, and let us denounce the weeds of evil wherever they are found.

As Christians reflecting beside the cradle in Bethlehem beneath the loving gaze of Mary, the woman who brings salvation into history, let us stand in solidarity with God's project and maintain our Christian criteria. Let us know how to criticize earthly projects from the perspective of God's project. Let us not believe in them just because they're there or because that's what most people do. Let us be like Mary, who possesses a profound knowledge of what God desires and resolutely follows her God. This is the pastoral norm by which I always want to examine these realities and by which I would like all my beloved faithful to work — especially priests, religious, and catechists.

I begin with an event that affected the normal services performed by the archdiocese. I refer to the occupation of the archdiocesan offices. A bulletin has been issued, and I do not have anything new to say about it.

The bulletin states: «On the nineteenth at twelve noon a group from the February 28 People's Leagues occupied the archdiocesan offices. The occupation was then extended to the San José de la Montaña Seminary, and the occupiers stated that they would remain for an indefinite period of time.

«Second, the occupiers said that the motive of the occupation was to ask the archbishop to denounce the repressive manner in which various evictions had been carried out

⁷ *La Prensa Gráfica* (22 December 1979).

in recent days. They wanted him to intervene in order to attain the freedom of those who had been detained in the evictions, which were carried out by security forces. They also asked for the return of the disappeared persons and the bodies of those who had perished.

«Third, considering the aforesaid, we make clear the following: (a) we consider this action unnecessary and abusive since our archdiocesan church, given her preferential option for the poor, has always advocated for the just causes of the people without any external coercion».

Afterwards the occupiers tried to say that they were pressuring the junta, not the bishop, but I personally witnessed ideological aggressiveness. One occupier told me that I was no longer serving the people and that I had made a 180-degree turn and was now siding with the powerful. I told him that his statement was very offensive, and I asked him for proof. That wasn't the moment for such arguments, but you can see the mentality of some of the occupiers and the aggressive nature of that occupation.

The bulletin continues, «(b) Regarding the persons who were in the building at that time, their situation varied: some were considered hostages while others were released and allowed to leave the place or to remain voluntarily». This arrangement was worked out through consultation with the leadership of the Leagues. Certainly, they started out by taking hostages, and they took a telephone out of the hand of one of the secretaries. It was only during the night, when it was made clear that they had not been ordered to take hostages, that they began to tell those who wanted to leave that they could do so. «In this regard, we report that in the end there remained only two priests, who were the persons appointed by the archbishop to be responsible for the property of the archdiocese and the seminary.

«(c) On their own initiative»—not because of any pressure—«the Legal Aid Office of the archdiocese had already denounced the evictions and taken measures to secure the release of those detained». The Legal Aid director showed the occupiers the petition that he had already prepared, denouncing precisely what they were pressuring us to denounce.

«(d) Archbishop Romero, in his humanitarian and pastoral way, dialogued with the occupiers and named a special commission that is negotiating a peaceful and just solution to the conflict»⁸.

Yesterday at noon, thank God, the occupiers left the archdiocesan offices, which had been functioning in the meantime in the office of San José de la Montaña parish. But for four days the work of the archdiocese was disrupted unnecessarily—I almost said «senselessly». (Applause)

Among the many expressions of solidarity we received, I want to thank the Christian Democratic Party for the one they published in the papers. Since I am in no way a politician, I cede the word to those who are able to analyze the events in political terms. The political statement of the Christian Democrats reads, «This is really an unusual action, one that is truly inconceivable within the framework of rational political analysis, for the whole Salvadoran

⁸ «Information Bulletin No. 71 of the Social Communication Office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador». *Manuscripts of the Schemas of the Homilies of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero*, in the Office for the Cause of the Canonization of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero, Archbishop's Office of San Salvador.

nation is aware that the person who has defended human rights more courageously than anyone else in the country is Archbishop Romero. There is no need to occupy his offices to persuade him to intercede for detained persons since he has been doing this for a long time now, and our people realize this and support the archbishop's valor»⁹. (Applause)

The statement continues with a political critique, which is not part of my role, but I do have a responsibility to listen. It states, «Those who call themselves the vanguard of the struggle for the liberation of our people have acted irrationally in occupying the archdiocesan offices, for these offices have become the very place where the people feel safe when denouncing injustice. They have become a symbol of the struggle of our poor masses and a refuge for our compatriots who are persecuted for seeking a better nation. The so-called vanguard has done what even earlier dictatorships never dared to do»¹⁰. (Applause) May God forgive them just as I have forgiven them with all my heart for they acted in ignorance.

In this regard, Legal Aid reports that workers who are supported by members of the February 28 People's Leagues have at different places and on different days occupied two coffee estates and the Telediario Salvadoreño. First, at the Berlín estate the workers were demanding complete payment for the first fortnight of labor; they claim that they were being required to work an extra week without pay. Second, at the El Porvenir estate in Opico, besides asking to be paid correctly, they were asking that their end-of-year bonus be paid in full. And third, at the Telediario Salvadoreño the workers presented a petition of twenty-two points, the most important of which were salary increases and full payment of the end-of-year bonus. We've been informed that at the Telediario, as well as at the Berlín estate, the two sides are engaged in dialogue to try to resolve the conflicts.

On December 18 security forces evicted workers from several work sites, including the three just mentioned, as I will explain now. It has been officially reported that at the Berlín estate at least two women were killed, twenty-five persons were arrested, and five persons received bullet wounds. The report also says that a very strong, bellicose force arrived at Berlín and carried out other assaults. When the twenty-five arrested persons were brought before the court, eighteen were released; seven are still under arrest. Meanwhile, the people's organizations have denounced the disappearance of at least eight persons during this operation.

At Telediario Salvadoreño five persons were arrested. Yesterday they were brought before the court and then released. At the El Porvenir estate in Opico the result was much bloodshed. Twenty-six persons have been officially reported killed, but they have not yet been identified—residents of the place report that several women and children are among the dead. Sixteen persons were arrested, and five were hospitalized after receiving bullet wounds. The sixteen arrested were released yesterday. This operation was carried out on December 18 during a meeting of about 900 agricultural laborers. Eye-witnesses have told us that, besides the twenty-six persons reported dead, there are at least ten more corpses inside the estate. It has been impossible to verify this since the military cordon is still in place. According to residents, these corpses are being buried without proper legal procedures.

⁹ *La Prensa Gráfica* (21 December 1979).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Our Legal Aid Office has been working on these cases and has appealed to the courts of justice, the defense and security authorities, and the Special Investigatory Commission for Political Prisoners and Disappeared Persons. They are asking that there be an exhaustive investigation of these horrific events. They have already secured the release of twenty-five of those arrested. The judicial authorities promised to carry out an immediate inspection at the El Porvenir estate. The bodies will be exhumed and handed over to their families. In this regard, I want to advise any relatives who may be listening to the radio, or others who may be able to contact them, that the date of the exhumation will be announced by this radio station so that the families can be there. It will possibly be on December 26. Listen for the announcement.

I take advantage of this Legal Aid report concerning the actions of the People's Leagues to thank Legal Aid and to praise the great work that Doctor Roberto Cuéllar and his collaborators have done there. I have brought along this summary report so that you can see with what great effort and love they work; it reads, «From its foundation in 1975 until June of this year Legal Aid has presented 294 writs of habeas corpus. While the appalling Law of Public Order was still in force, Legal Aid defended 115 cases; it also dealt with 194 criminal cases, 65 individual labor cases, 35 collective labor cases, 82 civil cases, 45 cases involving leases, 10 transit cases, and 15 civil cases transferred to Vivienda Mínima»¹¹. This is the work that Legal Aid does, and it does it without any need for pressure; it does it with great enthusiasm.

(Applause)

I must also denounce here other arbitrary arrests that occurred this week. We have always done this, and we will continue to do it whenever necessary. For example, Jorge Elio Portillo was arrested by the National Guard in Comasagua. Manuel Antonio Marroquín Arteaga, a worker at Goldtree was also arrested. The *campesinos* José Rubén Ábreo, Rodrigo Alvarenga, and Luis Octavio Anduray were arrested in Chalatenango. Keeping faith in this way to the principles of the church, we will continue our defense of human rights as we have done in the past.

This week we also had some churches occupied, and I say the same about them as I said about the archdiocesan offices: such occupations are not necessary as way of applying pressure. Of course, if the occupations are a matter of security or defense, we have always allowed them, but in such cases the attitude of the guests should be respectful. In fact, permission should be requested, and the guests should know the conditions for staying in the church.

Now, with the same pastoral energy, I want to address the people's groups and their armed branches, for they have also carried out a series of actions that have caused grief for many families and have overshadowed our nation with fear and ruin. I am speaking about the murder of many persons simply because they were thought to be members of ORDEN or collaborators of the previous regime. According to reports, on November first about forty persons were murdered by these leftist groups. Neighbors of several villages have condemned as senseless and dangerous the publication of lists and the threats being made against people who are often innocent. In any case, people should never take vengeance into their own hands.

¹¹ See *Manuscripts of the Schemas of the Homilies of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero*, in the Office for the Cause of the Canonization of Archbishop Óscar A. Romero, Archbishop's Office of San Salvador.

I also denounce the anarchistic ways in which people are making showy displays of military force, seeking to take justice into their own hands and provoking popular insurrection. Equally reprehensible are those who have set fire to stores, factories, vehicles, and the like, leaving many families without sources of income.

We cannot accept the motives behind the strategies of some of these groups. They claim, for example, «We have to prevent the government from taking the masses away from us», or «We have to destroy the country's economy in order to destabilize the government». In the long run these slogans and strategies are leading us to ruin and a fratricidal war. We are never going to be in accord with objectives that lead to more bloodshed. There is only one political language for everyone who wants to do political work for our people: it is the language of the common good of people.

In this regard I want to cite what the Holy Father said concerning the World Day of Peace: «As long as threats and certain forms of violence are encouraged for reasons of ideology or advantage, as long as support is given to those who say that in the last analysis violent struggle is the only way to establish justice, and as long as all these things persist, goodness, prudence, and discretion will repeatedly end up losing to the simple, brutal logic of violence, a logic that may reach the point of suicidal exaltation of violence for its own sake»¹². The pope declares, «Things must be called by their proper name, and murder must be called murder, even if ideological and political motives attempt to change its nature»¹³. Violence does nothing more than aggravate the situation.

Also, taking advantage of the pope's protest against the kidnappings in Rome, I will repeat his very words to those who are responsible for the kidnappings here, with the hope that the grace of Christmas will move the hearts of the kidnappers. Pope John Paul made an appeal for the release of kidnap victims in Italy, and he specifically cited some cases that don't need to be mentioned here as much as do the cases of our Salvadoran kidnap victims: Jamie Hill, Jamie Battice, Adolfo McEntee, and Archibald Dunn, the ambassador of South Africa. I want to speak especially and directly to the FPL about this last case. I have been informed of the peremptory nature of their conditions, and I want to plead with them, in the name of humanity in this Christmas season, that they be more reasonable and realistic in their demands. As the voice of an anguished church, I want to make mine the words of the sick wife of Mr. Dunn: «Christmas is the season that brings out the spirit of goodwill in all people. As a grieving wife and mother, and a human being like yourselves, I beg you, now that the eyes of the entire world are upon you, to show that you are capable of a humanitarian act by returning my husband to the warmth of his home, where his grandchildren, his children, and I await him»¹⁴. I will gladly intervene on behalf of all these persons in order to achieve their freedom. What I want, as I told you last year and say now with greater anguish than ever, is that we may celebrate this Christmas with no one who's still alive missing from their homes.

¹² JOHN PAUL II, «The True Force of Peace: Message for the World Day of Peace», 8 December 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 December 1979). Archbishop Romero is reading here from the version published in *La Prensa Gráfica* (19 December 1979), which is slightly different from the official Spanish text. Where *La Prensa Gráfica* says, «goodness, prudence, and discretion will repeatedly end up losing...», *L'Osservatore Romano* says, «the nuances, the restraints, and the choices will repeatedly give way....»

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ «Message of Mrs. Daphne Dunn to the People's Liberation Forces» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (21 December 1979).

Encouraged by the pope's message and by these appeals, I sincerely want to urge all those working in political struggles on behalf of the people to try to be guided by faith and motivated by the ideals of God's project so that your labors are well received and your social and political force is truly constructive.

With great love and earnestness I also want to encourage our beloved priests, our religious, and our other pastoral ministers to accept courageously the challenge presented to us at this moment and to carry out a genuine ministry of accompaniment. I recommend that you read the editorial in this week's *Orientación*, which treats of this pastoral line of action. What we must do today is not simply accompany people but practice a ministry that allows us to accompany all the organizations and political forces¹⁵.

Finally, I want to address once again those who control the country's economic power and who will necessarily be affected by the reforms and nationalizations that are proposed. Here I am happy to express my approval of the major political event of the week, namely, the announcement that foreign sales of coffee and sugar will be nationalized. This will certainly benefit the country. The experts will naturally have to design this law, so my role as pastor is simply to encourage our government officials to move forward with justice and love for the common good.

I am saying all this with pastoral Christian bluntness because I believe that among us there is much goodwill and good sense that can save our country. And that's why I am grieved at the disorder caused by the recent return to repressive violence in our countryside. There is no room for repressive force if the government claims to be working for the well-being of our people. I must therefore decry these atrocities which bring to grief many of our hopes; they nourish the hatred of many groups and sow distrust in the very heart of our country. Why was there a need to resort once again to military instead of political solutions to resolve the labor problems in industry and agriculture? Was there not supposed to be a break with the past? Will not the staining again of our soil with blood give credibility to those who say that this government is a continuation of the previous regime, and thus cause a loss of credibility with the people? Have those in government perhaps let themselves be seduced by the pressures of those who do not want change of any kind? Keeping the promise it made not to yield to the pressures of extremism is the only way the government can recover and maintain the honor of a military institution that has lost much credibility. Or is it the case that there are still elements in that institution that are in league with particular interests and so are doing things to discredit the army and stir up doubts about the good intentions and efforts of the government? (Applause)

In similar manner I want to address the economically powerful. In the spirit of Christmas I invite you to proclaim with Jesus and the Gospel that there is only one God, a God who does not tolerate idols, and that it is impossible to serve both God and money (Luke 16:13). It is for this reason that Christ comes to save us through the poor and through austerity. The good of the country demands sacrifices, but so far they have been required only of the poor majority who have had to live for ages in hunger and misery. It is only right that others make some sacrifice. Do not defend your privileges and interests by waging violence and creating armies. That would make matters worse and would lead to nothing good because progress and prosperity cannot be built on such shabby underpinnings. The Gospel demand for

¹⁵ *Orientación* (23 December 1979).

social justice is difficult, but justice is the only solid foundation for the creation of peace and jobs. Doing anything else means making yourselves responsible before history for the explosions of desperation and violence and for accelerating the dictatorial control that no one desires.

Dear sisters and brothers, excuse me for going on so long. Let us conclude as Puebla did (P 303), by praying before the image of Mary, who has been the key figure of this reflection. This is the hour of Mary, the time of a new Pentecost over which she presides with her prayer, the time when the church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, initiates a new stage in her pilgrimage. Mary is here with us in this Christmas season, and with her at our side we become children again, seeking the true happiness that Jesus brings us.

We'll now participate in this activity by which the church reinforces these young men in their heroic desire to work on behalf of the liberation of their people, always doing so as part of Jesus' project of salvation. These young men, along with the others who fill our seminaries, give us hope that God's saving power is becoming incarnate in the people of El Salvador. Let it be so! (Applause)