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NO TO VIOLENCE! YES TO PEACE!

The Epiphany of the Lord¹

6 January 1978

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Beloved brother priests and dear faithful, distinguished members of the National Commission for Peace and Justice, esteemed radio listeners.

Tonight this cathedral filled with the faithful is the protagonist of a centuries-long procession of people that began two thousand ago. In tonight's first reading, the prophet Isaiah announces to us that from the darkness of the world the nations were to go in search of that mystical light that shone in Jerusalem: the light of God. With marvelous poetry the prophet has proclaimed this evening the epiphany of a God who becomes present to the nations, who goes forth to encounter those who were searching in shadows, in darkness, in doubt. They were looking for a stable peace and happiness, which were finally found, as Saint Matthew's gospel tells us, by those magi who were the first witnesses of the prophecy that was about to be fulfilled. Those magi from the East came as the vanguard of that long procession of centuries and nations just as the prophecy of Isaiah began to be realized: «From all the ends of the earth people will come to the crib of Jesus to recognize him as God, King, Savior of humankind» (Isa 52:10).

This evening we are part of that procession. Blessed are those who in faith share the great joy of the magi in finding Jesus! Blessed also are those who still don't have this faith, for certainly there are people who have doubts in these dark times of confusion, and yet they ask, «Does this peace really exist? Does this Savior Christ really exist? Is there really a God who can save us from the horrendous situation in which we live?»

We now conclude, sisters and brothers, three nights of reflection on peace. I want to congratulate heartily the lay members of the National Commission for Justice and Peace who have so profoundly echoed the teaching of the church. Thanks to them we have heard in this cathedral the profound theological reflections of the Archbishop of Panama, one of the great theologians of Latin America. He demonstrated the significance that Pope Paul's message has not only for 1978 but also for the whole of church history. The church has always placed before people a message of peace, but this message has received greater emphasis during these times when peace has been so compromised by violence. More than ever we hear the strong voice of the church's teaching.

¹ With this eucharistic celebration Archbishop Romero closed the three days of reflection for the World Day of Peace.

Last night we heard a man active in the professional world² synthesize the thinking of those people of our times who realize that they have to look to the church's teaching. When people live with noble hearts and sound intentions, they listen to the church. They are not prejudiced against her but listen to her with an open heart for they realize the truth of the church's present and eternal cry: «No to violence! Yes to peace!»³

And I believe that it is providential, sisters and brothers, that along with the gift of Pope Paul's message to the world, a special message has been sent for El Salvador. The pope's words of «peace to people of good will» were spoken to the Salvadoran ambassador before the Holy See⁴ like the message of the angels in Bethlehem, and they take the concrete form of a homily directed to Salvadorans. The pope stated that the sincere search of Salvadorans for peace, such as we have witnessed during these past three nights, has an answer. If Salvadoran hearts continue this search with sincerity, they will find this peace. I want to take this firm hope of Pope Paul VI and plant it in the hearts of Salvadorans and thus make this Epiphany, like that of the magi, an encounter with Christ in the arms of Mary, the Queen of Peace. Under the magnificent sign of Jesus is peace, the full fruit of redemption. Peace was the greeting of the risen Lord, freed from the chains of sin which had now been redeemed, freed from the prisons of death and hell that were now closed down by the reign of redemption. With a single phrase Jesus greets all people of good will: «Peace be with you. My peace I give you, not as the world gives peace» (John 20:19; 14:27). The church continues to offer this gift of peace. Saint Paul calls Christ *Pax Nostra* (Eph 2:14-16); he is «our peace» because he reconciled humanity with God and human beings among themselves. By his blood he broke down the walls of hatred, violence, rancor, and resentment, and he sowed justice and love as the essential conditions for peace: «Love one another» (John 15:12).

Paul VI echoes these words of Jesus when he refers with keen insight to our Salvadoran reality. I want to emphasize three ideas of the pope's discourse and make this the final message of these wonderful nights which you, by your presence here in the cathedral, have made most special with your enthusiastic attention. The people's hunger and thirst for peace are expressed through you.

Without any distinction

The pope speaks for us, and the first idea I find in his discourse is that Salvadorans should look with hope to the center of the church in their search for peace. The pope opens his arms to the ambassador and says, «Going beyond all due courtesy, we want to welcome in your person the whole republic of El Salvador and each one of its inhabitants, without any distinction».

What a great heart this representative of Christ has! I believe that in this phrase there is a whole Epiphany, a total encounter of our people with the one who represents Christ sowing peace on earth. The pope cries out those words that have resonated throughout the world: «No to violence! Yes to peace!» The pope's heart becomes Salvadoran in receiving us all without distinction; he goes beyond all due courtesy, breaking molds so that the hearts of all Salvadorans without distinction feel close to him. He said he often thought about our republic with the solicitude of one who sees Salvadorans as his beloved children.

² Reference to Dr. Alfredo Martínez Moreno.

³ PAUL VI, «No to Violence! Yes to Peace!». Message for the World Day of Peace (1 January 1978).

⁴ The quoted passages in this homily, unless otherwise indicated, come from the address of Paul VI before the ambassador of El Salvador to the Holy See. See *L'Osservatore Romano* (18 December 1977).

Guidelines of a social nature

The pope's second reflection touches on some guidelines of a social nature. «We are well aware», the Holy Father tells the ambassador, «that the vast majority of Salvadorans live their lives in close conformity to their Christian faith and do not forget the many practical implications of that faith in personal, family, and social matters. All this presents a set of relationships and expectations to which the Holy See and the church, faithful to their duty, must give careful thought. Above all, recognition and praise are due to the Salvadoran people's commitment to improving their general living conditions, starting from the global view of the person and of humanity that the church teaches them».

I want to tell you, sisters and brothers, that I feel proud to be a Salvadoran tonight, and I want to tell all my fellow citizens that we should feel profoundly praised by the words of the pope. He helps us see social concerns from a Christian perspective; he helps us understand the transcendence of faith in our struggle for liberation; he helps us see, contrary to all those who have maligned us in our struggles, that as Salvadorans we cannot split this relationship between our social concerns and our reference to faith. That is why the church, in fulfillment of her duty from a faith perspective, must also shed light on the realities of earth. She is concerned with those who have no bread, with those living on the margins, with the hungry and the poor. When the pope refers to our Salvadoran reality, the church feels fully supported by the Gospel and by the church's message.

Salvadorans carry their faith in their hearts, and from their faith they shed light on the realities of earth. That is why they cannot conceive a disincarnate faith, a faith like that of the Levite and the priest who see the wounded man and pay no mind because they are on their way to prayer (Luke 10:29-32). Any faith that takes the form of alienation from the painful realities of earth would not be a faith related to human suffering and to the difficult situations of our world. May God be blessed that the pope has stated that the Holy See and the church cannot renounce their duty of guiding this people who carry in their hearts a profound, transcendental faith and who are motivated by their faith to struggle for authentic Christian liberation.

As we engage in this struggle, I also make a call for us to renounce merely temporal types of liberation, those that do not transcend beyond history, those that seek to resolve problems with hatred, violence, and armed struggle. This is not true to our Salvadoran character but is a deformity of the heart. When the hearts of Salvadorans are aflame with hatred, armed struggle, abductions, crime, and bloodshed, they are no longer true Salvadorans; they honor neither their country nor their faith. They are traitors to the transcendence on which we were nourished at our mothers' breasts.

When the pope evokes this global vision of humanity that the church has taught, he cites paragraphs 13 and 14 of his own encyclical, *Populorum Progressio*, where the pope himself many years ago said that the church «shares the noblest aspirations of men and suffers when she sees these aspirations not satisfied, and she therefore wishes to help them attain their full realization» (PP 13). The church wants to do this precisely because she places before humankind what she herself possesses: a global vision of humanity. The church is proud to be able to pronounce this phrase: «Development cannot be restricted to economic growth alone. To be authentic it must be well rounded; it must foster the development of each man and of the

whole man. What counts for us is man—each individual man, each human group, and humanity as a whole» (PP 14).

Let us fully realize, sisters and brothers, that it is the church that understands us and comprehends our human concerns. The church is both human and divine. As human, she knows that nothing human is foreign to her. All of our human concerns reverberate in her heart, and she knows that every human person has a right to that development «which is the new name for peace» (PP 76). This development does not consist simply in possessing more, especially in economic terms. Rather, it consists in the full development of all men and women, all their faculties, and above all their divine vocation.

An orientation of faith in church-state relations

Finally, the pope's third thought in his discourse concerned the guidance of faith in church-state relations. The pope told the Salvadoran ambassador, «The church promotes and encourages these aspirations within the sphere of her specific competence. For this reason, while she lays claims also in your country to the indispensable freedom to preach the faith, teach her moral and social doctrine, and exercise her mission among men and women without hindrance, she always wishes to respect the competence of the temporal power in its proper sphere and to accept a constructive dialogue with the civil authorities in order to serve better the personal vocation of those who are at the same time citizens and faithful Christians».

Here the pope cites the Council constitution that refers to the relations between the church and the political community (GS 76). Both church and state have as their subjects human beings in their twofold vocation as citizens of earth and as faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, there should be no conflicts between these two authorities, which must promote the common good and the happiness of people on earth. At the same time, there must be respect for the people's eternal vocation, their orientation toward heaven, their spirituality, and their interior human development as Christians. That is why the pope demands freedom for the church in El Salvador but also states that the church should respect the autonomy of civil power. He pleads for constructive dialogue whose objective should not be just to obtain some privilege. The church must renounce privileges when her witness becomes tarnished in this relationship. Rather, she must seek dialogue with a view to serving better the personal vocation of those who are at once citizens and faithful Christians.

My sisters and brothers, this is the church's ideal: there should be good cooperation between the government, which is responsible for looking after the common good here on earth, and the church, which is responsible for guiding people with regard to their eternal vocation. This vocation is not divided between heaven and earth, but rather unites them to insure the people's happiness and the integral development of every person as both citizen and faithful Christian.

The pope ends by pointing out the fruits of these orientations: «The church, in fact, believes»,—these are the pope's words—«that this is the way to prevent evils and overcome the climate of violence that unfortunately at times has caused grief also in the church herself». Here the pope makes concrete his «No to violence!» in the Salvadoran context. If these Christian guidelines are followed, he says, then we will thwart many evils and will overcome the climate of violence that has brought such sorrow and keeps the church and so many families drowned in grief.

As you can see the pope does not ignore the past but calls it to mind. He does so with the hope that it will not be repeated, with the hope that we will seek the path of true concord in order to overcome this climate of violence. This «No to violence!» for 1978 must be sought on those roads the pope has pointed out, for «these are the way to construct a social atmosphere which corrects the evident injustices which prevent created goods from being shared equitably by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity». These are the words of the Holy Father who recognizes the sad Salvadoran reality: a social atmosphere in which the goods created by God do not provide happiness for all Salvadorans. In a true atmosphere of justice and fraternal love, this beautiful republic with its fertile fields and beautiful skies must bring joy to all Salvadorans, and we should feel like sisters and brothers blessed with gifts from God to be shared with all.

That is why, sisters and brothers, the «No to violence!» must be built firmly on foundations of justice. In Medellín the bishops of Latin America, with the approval of this same pope, stated that peace on the continent is not possible unless a more just order is also established (M 2:14). Peace is not the absence of war; peace is not fear of repression; peace is not a balance of two powers based on terror. Peace is the fruit of justice; peace is the flower of love and justice in society. The pope said that our «Yes to peace!» is a «Yes to God!», and we would add that our «Yes to peace!» is also a «Yes to justice!», a «Yes to love!», and a «Yes to understanding!» among all Salvadorans. Only in this way can we understand this simple affirmation of peace.

This is our Epiphany, dear sisters and brothers, an Epiphany that makes Christ present to us under this name of peace (Eph 2:14). Christ is our peace. As 1978 begins, may this prophecy of peace that resounds so intensely in this cathedral and also in many homes through the radio become truly a call to conversion. May those who feel no desire for this peace because of their selfish ways be converted and their hearts filled with love. May those who are far from this peace because their hands are stained with the blood of crimes wash their hands in repentance and realize that there is peace also for sinners and criminals when they repent and love. You are called to be at peace also in your homes. May there be love and reconciliation, and may Christ become present throughout the republic and in each and every Salvadoran.

This homily on peace, which is not mine, began in the Vatican with the pope. It found a magnificent echo in the National Commission for Justice and Peace. People from other places and other churches have come here to preach this message of peace. We heard of Panama's sympathy with El Salvador. We heard from well-informed speakers. Peace has been preached, thanks be to God. Now this homily ends as it ought to end, with a call to celebrate the Eucharist which proclaims that these are not simple words. These words are life. They are Christ in the mystery of his death and his resurrection. Christ lives and offers us peace, hoping that we will not prefer darkness to light. May the light of the Epiphany, the light of peace, the light of love, and the light of justice fill every corner of El Salvador.

Let us celebrate, then, sisters and brothers, this Eucharist. I want to thank our beloved priests for concelebrating with me to make this act more solemn. And I thank all of you for your presence. May your presence turn into fervent prayer that the blood of Christ we adore and the body of Christ offered for us will pay the price for every sin, every iniquity, every offense against peace. And may the Lord repeat from this altar his message to Salvadorans: «My peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you» (John 14:27).