

179

The Family as the Incarnation and the Epiphany of God

Feast of the Holy Family 30 December 1979

Sirach 3:3-7,14-17

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:41-52

First of all, I want to welcome the four hundred young people who have spent the night in prayer and reflection. This vigil has surely strengthened your spirits, and it has especially delighted God since your sense of church has been made more robust.

Just looking at you, dear youth, makes me think of the person who is our central figure this morning: the young Christ. While his family was on a journey to the temple, the twelve-year-old Jesus got lost, and his parents found him again in the temple. After a mysterious dialogue he returned with them to Nazareth to share in the humble family life that is briefly sketched for us in today's gospel: «The child grew in wisdom, in stature, and in grace before God and humanity» (Luke 2:52). This figure of the young Jesus is a beautiful way to close this vigil of prayer for you young people who have come from many different communities of the archdiocese. You are a wonderful example for all of our dear sisters and brothers and for all those listening by radio.

During this Christmas season let us continue to deepen the idea we were exploring during the time of Advent and that we now see brightly displayed before us: God visiting humanity and remaining with humanity. «The Word became flesh and dwelt among us» (John 1:14). The whole of the Christmas mystery, which extends from Christmas Eve until the Sunday after Epiphany, is summed up in this reality: God enters history and reveals himself to humankind.

It is a mystery of imminence: God descends into history, taking on all the problems of humanity. He becomes incarnate in all peoples and in all families, but he does so not just to remain there but to transcend. For Christmas is also a mystery of transcendence: if God becomes human, it is so that we humans will be raised to divinity. God becomes human so that all the human, political, and social problems of our history can be carried along in that stream of transcendence toward that Word who was made flesh to give us divine life and participation in God's happiness for all eternity. By celebrating Christmas we let ourselves be caught up in the current of Christ.

One of the manifestations of God made man in that mystery of imminence and transcendence is precisely the family, for Christ would not be truly human if he had no family. Neither would we be truly human if we had no memory of mother and father, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, all those who make up a family. That is why, when the Word became man, he began by sanctifying that reality of the family. So the church, having commemorated

the mystery of God made man during Christmastide, now invites us to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family.

The theme of this homily will be «The Family as the Incarnation and the Epiphany of God». That's what every family is. Since God becomes incarnate in the family, the family should be an epiphany revealing that God is alive in the world. So the customary three thoughts with which I'll develop this idea are these: first, the presence of God in the family; second, the family as the domestic church of Christ; and third, the family as a pastoral priority in Latin America.

The presence of God in the family

First, what stands out in today's readings is the intimate relation between God and family, between family and God. What else is the gospel if not the incarnation of God in a family and the transcendent movement of that family—Mary, Joseph, and the child—toward God? We already said that this family of Nazareth was traveling to the temple, which was the national religious center of Israel. Every Passover was a national religious feast for the Jews, and this good Israelite family, like all families, made an annual journey to Jerusalem, just as our families leave their fields to celebrate their patronal feasts. This is a sign of how our families journey toward God. How beautiful it is to see families coming to Mass on Sunday! Let us hope that the example of today's gospel will be repeated in our cities and in our countryside: a family in search of God.

The sacred character of the family is brought to light. The point of the dialogue between Christ and his parents is to explain to them that there is a heavenly Father who is above earthly mothers and fathers and that young people should not be manipulated by either their fathers or their mothers when there is question of the will of their Father in heaven. The Virgin asked Jesus, «Son, why have you done this?» And Christ responded with all the tenderness of a human son but also with the courage of a Son of God: «Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I had to see about my Father's business?» (Luke 2:48-49). All of us have to say the same thing. Even the great love between spouses, which is sanctified by God and lasts till death, must always be subordinated to the love of God. The law of God is above all other things.

The other day I was told that some people were criticizing me because I had spoken about the church's doctrine concerning fertility and about the prohibition of certain sinful acts in marriage. They asked, «Why does he have to get involved in such intimate matters?» The truth is that I'm not the one who gets involved in intimate matters—God does! He is the creator of nature and the creator of sexes. He is the head of the family who lays down the law to which all must submit: husband, wife, and children. «Did you not know that I had to see about my Father's business?» (Luke 2:49). God is before all else because he is the source of paternity for every family, for every love, for every relation.

Christ sets an example for every family oriented toward God. It is the example of obedience to the Father, from whom flows vocation. Since this Mass is for you, beloved youth, please realize that this is the most important question of your lives: what does God want me to do? You must learn to discern this above and beyond all familial and economic considerations: what does God want me to do? How often we hear it said, «I would like to be a priest, but I am very poor». It doesn't matter. «Seek the kingdom of God and his justice»—obedience to your vocation—«and all the rest will be given to you as well» (Matt 6:33). Are not most of us who are priests also poor? Have we not heard our mothers lament, «How I'd love to please you, but

I'm too poor to do so»? Many of the priests here have encountered that same difficulty, but thank God we followed the will of the Lord, and the means were found. When God desires something, he often puts our wits to the test.

Finally they returned to their home in Nazareth. Soon after Paul VI was elected pontiff, he went to the Holy Land to visit that little house in Nazareth where now a magnificent church has been built. He remarked at the time, «Who wouldn't want to live here in the company of that holy family of Nazareth and learn about the simplicity of their life in silence, work, and prayer»¹! Who wouldn't want our own little houses, dear youth, dear sisters and brothers, no matter how humble they are, to be like that little house of Nazareth!

Today's first reading shows us how those routine family chores can be made into worship of God. Spend some time meditating on the book of Ecclesiasticus, which shows that a close relation exists between our duties toward our parents and the blessings of God.

The reading begins by saying that everything proceeds by the initiative of God. «God honors a father above his children, and he confirms a mother's authority over her children» (Sir 3:2). Nowadays, when conflict between generations is common, a son or a daughter may say to a parent, «You don't understand today's young people». It's almost as though they think they're wiser than their parents. Let them remember this principle: «God honors the parents above their children». Your father may be a *campesino* and you a university graduate; your mother may be a humble market lady and you a professional—that doesn't make you superior to them. God has given them an authority that you don't have. All authority comes from God and is to be used as God desires. Your parents have received their commission from the Lord, and it should be respected.

«Those who honor their parents atone for their sins» (Sir 3:2). This is family obligation with religious import. Since forgiveness of sins is a religious matter, honoring our parents becomes forgiveness of our sins. That's why children who respect their parents are so happy. Even though parents have their defects and their sins, we know loving mom and dad is something purifying. If we truly love them, we will avoid everything that can cause them shame.

Sirach continues, «Those who honor their parents will delight in their children, and when they pray they will be heard» (Sir 3:5). Here we have another familial duty with a religious aspect. Honoring your mother and father is equivalent to having an audience with God. God will hear you when you are respectful toward your parents: «The Lord hears those who respect their father and their mother» (Sir 3:7).

The same idea is repeated again: «Kindness toward your parents will not be forgotten; it will serve as a reparation for your sins» (Sir 3:14). Help that is given to your parents is an alms that God receives. If Christ says of poor folk, «Whatever you do for them, you do for me» (Matt 25:40), then with all the more reason should we help the venerable members of our family, who are our parents. Whatever we offer to our mother and our father is received by God as payment for our sins.

¹ PAUL VI, «Homily in the Crypt of the Annunciation in Nazareth», 5 January 1964.

«God will remember you on the day of your ordeal» (Sir 3:15). The Bible speaks often of the «day of God», which is the day when each of us is judged, the day when we must render accounts to the Lord. The reckoning will come out well if we have had good relations with our parents.

While we are reflecting on the family, I want to remind you of the beautiful statements of Pope John Paul II in Mexico. Speaking of how closely the family is related to God he declared, «It has been beautifully and profoundly said that our God in his most intimate mysterious being is not solitary but family, for he encompasses within himself paternity, progeny, and the essence of family, which is love. In the divine family this love is the Holy Spirit. The theme of the family, therefore, is not unrelated to the theme of the Holy Spirit»². It's wonderful knowing that God is family, for in God there are Father and Son, and the bond that unifies them as family: Love in the person of the Holy Spirit. That is why on earth, when God said, «Let us make humans in our image and likeness» (Gen 1:26-27), he made man and woman so that they would love one another in marriage and be fruitful in bringing forth family, all of which would be anointed by Love, by the Spirit of God.

Blessed are the homes where this relation with God is not forgotten, where the family is a true religious community that prays, that gives thanks, and that is sanctified by honoring the Lord. The more a family is mindful of this relation with God, the more present God will be on earth. If God in heaven is family, then God on earth is also family. That's why we have titled this homily «The Family as the Epiphany of God».

The family as the domestic church of Christ

Our second reflection brings us back to the Christian conception of the family as the domestic church. This phrase is not mine; it comes from the Second Vatican Council, which states that the family is a «domestic church» in which parents are the first priests for their children; it is where they mutually sanctify one another and are raised toward God (LG 11). In Mexico the pope said that «the greatest need of Latin America is to make every Christian family a domestic church, with all the rich implications of that term»³.

Today's second reading inspires me with this thought because Saint Paul, in writing to the Colossians to warn them of possible errors about Christ, presents them with a marvelous Christology explaining who Christ is. Paul says they should not see Christ as someone far off but as a man of flesh and as the head of all who want to be incorporated by baptism into membership in him. Those who are baptized participate in his death and in his resurrection so that the life of Christ permeates the lives of all Christians. That is why the church, given life by the Spirit of God, is called the «Body of Christ», the «family of God», and the «people of God». This concept of the people of God has a wealth of consequences. It especially elevates the family in the Christian era because the mother, the father, and the children in the Christian family belong to another great family, which is the church. Nevertheless, the church depends on that domestic family unit since the church is made up of Christian families. This is the great richness of our church: the more domestic churches there are in the diocese—and the more true communities of faith, charity, love, hope, and prayer—the more our archdiocese will be

² JOHN PAUL II, «Homily at the Mass in Puebla de Los Angeles, Mexico», 28 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 February 1979).

³ Ibid.

church, and the more our families will be church. Mediating between families and the larger church are the parishes, the ecclesial base communities, the youth groups, and all the other groups that come together with the spirit of church to reflect on the Bible, to be nourished by the sacraments, to be in communion with the bishop—all this is indispensable in the church family. The tighter these bonds grow, the more the church will grow, and the more mothers and fathers and young people will bring the strength of the church into their homes.

Christianity introduces the mystery of the church into the family. When a marriage is blessed in the Christian church, people discover a vast panorama that goes beyond the simple love of man and woman. They come to realize that such love is a reflection of the love with which Christ loves the church: the husband becoming Christ and the wife becoming the church. It reflects the invincible love between Christ and the church which in the course of history will overcome difficulties, temptations, and every kind of violence. This love, forever uniting Christ and the church and making them fruitful in holiness, is reflected in the fidelity of matrimony despite the temptations, the difficulties, and anything that would violate the marvel of church unity.

In the letter of Saint Paul that was read today, Paul lists the ecclesial elements and at the very end of the letter mentions the duties of the family. In this way he is telling us that the family is submerged in the sea of the church, but the family itself must be a small church within the universal church. What are the elements of church that today's reading proposes to us?

Saint Paul calls the Christians of Colossae «a chosen people of God, holy and beloved» (Col 3:12). Don't you recognize here, dear sisters and brothers, an echo of the Old Testament: God calling Israel to be his chosen people? That is what the church is in the New Testament, and that's why Paul calls her the «new Israel, the Israel of God» (Gal 6:16). In the Old Testament God made Israel his family, to such a degree that they were considered to be husband and wife, and despite the betrayals of Israel, God always remained faithful. Similarly, in the New Testament the church is a holy people consecrated to God, the people loved and chosen by God. And so I tell you again, dear sisters and brothers, during this time of political convulsion and confusion, let us not confuse the general concept of «people» with the concept of «people of God». Such a confusion gives rise to many errors, even in Christian communities. The Christian community is precisely what Saint Paul has said it is: chosen, holy, loved by God. Accordingly, this chosen community must sanctify, enlighten, guide, and accompany the general mass of people, but without being confused with them. It must give rise to ferment without losing its fermenting power.

So, my dear young friends, if you belong to one of the people's political organizations, magnificent! But you must also be Christians. Don't forget that as you mix in with the masses of people and the people's organizations you have a special commission. Besides being citizens of El Salvador, you are God's chosen people, a holy people consecrated to God and loved by God. Don't miss out on that love by doing foolish things that are perhaps inspired by other ideologies. Know how to be leaven in your organizations. Know how to be politically committed without betraying the love God has for you as the people of God. Just as we're not ashamed of our homes when we're with others, neither should we be ashamed or feel inferior about being Christians when we're with people who boast that they have little faith.

On this feast of the Holy Family it's very important for us to grasp that our community must be the family of God. All the children of God's family come together in community, just as

people working in different parts of the republic come home on weekends to be family. When they are there at the dinner table with their mother, they remember their childhood, and divisions disappear. There are no factions; there is just family, and from family come the love, passion, and familial pride that allow us to make political commitments without betraying our love of family.

This is what the whole Christian community should be, a place where different political options converge, encompassing government officials, soldiers, members of the People's Revolutionary Bloc, and the FAPU and the Leagues as well. As a united family before our common Father, we should all swear before God never to betray our commitments to Christ or our convictions regarding faith and family. The Christian community should not fail to become incarnate in the reality of the people. To the contrary, it is hard to be a good Christian without experiencing the raw reality of our country, but that reality must be experienced with faith. On the basis of faith those who belong to this sacred family, loved and chosen by God, must move among all those who are not chosen or holy or beloved of God. They may even be atheists or enemies of God, but don't lose your faith. You are not an atheist; you are not a criminal; you should not contribute to the violence that goes against your conscience. (Applause) In my opinion, sisters and brothers, that is the heart of the conflict in our country: all Salvadorans are baptized and so belong to this holy people, but in practice they forget it. That's why in our time the ecclesial base communities are trying to wake people up to their true baptismal commitment so that they will experience holy pride in belonging to this «chosen people of God, holy and beloved» (Col 3:12).

Using this as a basis, Saint Paul defines the duties of this people and all its members: «Clothe yourselves with the uniform of the people of God, that is, with feelings of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with one another, and forgive one another if anyone has a complaint against another. As the Lord has forgiven, so must you also forgive. And over all these put on love, which is the bond of perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, the peace into which you have been called in one body» (Col 3:12-15). This is the great privilege of Christians: to wear the uniform of virtues and to be called to join our hearts with the heart of Christ so that they all are one. That is why many of the strategies that earthly commitments propose to Christians are not compatible with authentic Christianity. Take care, then, to do honor to your family, the people of God.

In this way our church family and our human family become a spiritual offering to the Lord, as Saint Paul tells us, «Be thankful. Let the word of God dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him» (Col 3:16-17). What a magnificent description of the priestly role you lay people have in the world by virtue of your baptism!

Because of baptism all of you, as God's family, must celebrate your Mass in the world. You celebrate Mass! Saint Paul has described well what the Mass of the laity is: «Whatever you do, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus» (Col 3:17). What lay people do is marvelous. When I see this great crowd in the cathedral, I think of how many different ways they have of earning a living! Some of you are professionals working in legal offices or medical clinics; some work at home or on their engineering projects. Others are workers in different factories—what skilled hands you have! Some are employees, and some are market vendors while others toil as domestic workers or care for children. Still others are laborers who plow the fields and sow

them. All those activities are the lay people's Mass. So when the priest, as the servant of you who are a priestly people, gathers all these different labors together during the eucharistic Mass, he is fulfilling the mission that only he can do, but he does so in order to give meaning to all the different kinds of work that you do: «Take this bread, fruit of the earth and of human labor»⁴. So the Sunday Mass is not something I celebrate alone, nor do I concelebrate it only with other priests, as I'm doing today with Father Rafael Urrutia. Any Mass that I celebrate or which other priests celebrate here or in a parish is the Mass of all of you. It is the Mass of all who come to offer God their concerns, their worries, and the labors of their week in every field. The priest, therefore, has the great responsibility of transforming this most sacred moment into the true Mass of the laity and authentic worship of the people of God.

Everything I'm saying here is summed up in the Puebla document's reflections on the family: «The couple sanctified by the sacrament of matrimony bears testimony to the paschal presence of the Lord» (P 583). That means that it is no longer simply an Old Testament-type of marriage; it is the marriage of baptized persons who bear the paschal mark of the death and resurrection of Christ. Wherever there are married Christians, there is testimony of the paschal presence of the Lord.

«The Christian family cultivates the spirit of love and service», says Puebla (P 583). The spirit of love and service is what brings happiness to true Christian families. «Human beings reach their full development through the four basic relationships of family life: as parents, as children, as siblings, and as spouses» (P 583). That includes all those relationships: the relation of parent to child; the relation of son or daughter to mother or father; the relation among those born of the same married couple; and the relation between the two principal members of the family, the husband and the wife. What a magnificent synthesis!

«These same relationships make up the life of the church: the experience of God as Father»—for we have a Father who calls all of us his children; «the experience of Christ as brother»—we feel that Christ is our brother in this great family of our only Father, God; «the experience of being sisters and brothers with and through the Son»—we are united to Christ in the church community, where Christ stands out above all as the center of our gatherings and the one around whom we experience ourselves as sisters and brothers and through whom we relate to our Father as children; «and the experience of Christ as spouse of the church»—as spouses relate to one another in the home, so is the relation between Christ and the church, which is the assembly of all the faithful. «Family life allows these four basic experiences to be part of our everyday experience. They are the four faces of human love» (P 583). This synthesis by itself gives us enough for a whole homily. In the church we have a glorious experience of the four faces of human love in our encounter with God and with Christ, and we experience them also in ordinary life with our parents, with our sisters and brothers, and with others as well.

In a passage not read today, Saint Paul speaks also about the relations with servants and slaves and others who work for the family's well-being. There is so much to say here. At this time when social sensitivity uses concepts carelessly, it would be good to return to the word of God, which gives this counsel to workers and those who earn their living by serving others: «Serve them, but as if serving the Lord. Render service as if you are serving God». And to employers themselves Paul says, «Render service as well, as persons who must render account to God!» (Col 3:22—4:1). Ah, if only we were mindful of this relationship with God, the Father

⁴ *Roman Missal, Offertory.*

of all, before whom all of us—bosses and workers, rich and poor—must render accounts, we would not have this present conflict in our country between two classes of people: first-class and second-class! (Applause) To sum up, sisters and brothers, what we want is families with church spirit and a church with family spirit.

Puebla then speaks of the ecclesial base communities that exist in many parishes. I would like us to take these communities very seriously and to work to build them up. I'm happy to be celebrating here today with these young people who have come from different communities, and I want them to take this family spirit back with them and instill it deeply in their communities and parishes. Don't forget that the ecclesial base communities shouldn't be little islands or clubs but should be open to the whole parish, just as the parish must be open to the diocese and the diocese must be open to the universal church so that the universal church can celebrate as one single family. This great day of the Holy Family brings all this to mind for us.

Puebla states, «Many parishes and dioceses are emphasizing family life, for they know that Latin Americans»—including us Salvadorans—«need family and are searching for it» (P 240). This is very true, and it is one of our great cultural treasures. Let us not lose it. All Salvadorans need family and look for one, but often mistakes are made and bad families result. As we leave this celebration of the Holy Family today, it would be wonderful if we gave thanks to God for the family spirit we Salvadorans have, but also if we asked God to guide our family spirit so that we form families the way God wants them.

«We say this», says Puebla, «because as people search for family, the church, which is also family, can offer a response to people's needs. It is not a question of psychological strategy but of being true to the church's identity, for the church is not just a place where people "feel" they are God's family; it is a place where they "become" God's family—really, profoundly, and ontologically». That is, we don't just «feel» like family, but we truly «become» family. «In the church people really become children of the Father in Jesus Christ, who shares his life with them through baptism by the power of the Spirit. This grace of divine adoption is the great treasure the church has to offer to the people of our continent» (P 240). «This grace of divine adoption» is the reason why I insist so much, sisters and brothers, that we be authentically church and that we not distort the true aims of the community. As part of the church and members of our Christian community we become children of God, and as children of God we work as brothers and sisters with everyone for the common good of that other family which is the nation. (Applause)

The family as a pastoral priority in Latin America

Now we are touching on our third point, the family as a pastoral priority in Latin America, I want to read to you what John Paul II says in this regard, for he has a wonderful concept of what the family should be in our continent.

In the discourse he delivered to the bishops at Puebla the pope named three pastoral priorities in Latin America. The first was the family, the second was religious and priestly vocations, and the third was young people⁵. This morning we are obeying the pope quite

⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse at the Opening of the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Puebla», 28 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (4 February 1979).

magnificently since we have the youth of our diocese gathered here and we are also united as a family.

Speaking to the bishops, the pope said, «Make every effort to ensure that there is pastoral ministry to the family in your dioceses. Give this work priority, with the assurance that the evangelization of the future will depend in large part on the “domestic church”. That is the school where we come to know God and learn about love, respect for life, and human dignity»⁶. I’m going to repeat here those four phrases that define the family. The pope said that the family is «the school where we come to know God and learn about love, respect for life, and human dignity. Pastoral ministry to the family is all the more important since there are so many threats to the family»⁷. And he made the concept even more explicit when he talked about «defending families against great evils, for the most negative results of development are especially reflected in the family: the truly depressing indices of sickness»—on this day of the family, let us think of all those children who are sick and all those fathers and mothers who are malnourished—«the poverty and misery, the ignorance and illiteracy, the inhuman housing conditions, the chronic malnourishment, and so many other equally sad realities»⁸. Do you see how the problems of families are closely connected with the great problem of social injustice that we have been insisting on? The fact that there are families like those the pope was describing is the result of social injustice. (Applause) Since we don’t want to have some families over-nourished while others are undernourished, we are supporting and advocating every measure that will bring about social justice in our country. (Applause)

«The church pledges to help to defend families against these evils, and she urges governments to give priority to establishing a social policy toward families that is intelligent, bold, and resolute, recognizing that in the family lies undoubtedly the future hope of the continent»⁹.

His Holiness became even more eloquent when he expressed his desires for all the families of the continent from that platform of Puebla and when he described how he felt upon entering so many homes where families lived modestly: «They were houses where there was no lack of food or wellbeing but where harmony and joy were perhaps missing; houses where families lived modestly but uncertain about the morrow, helping one another mutually to lead a difficult but dignified existence»¹⁰. That is a beautiful phrase to describe poor families: «a difficult but dignified existence». (Applause)

Let us keep following the pope’s discourse, where he speaks of «poor dwellings on the fringes of our cities, where there is much hidden suffering, even though the simple joy of the poor is there too». He mentions also «the humble dwellings of the *campesinos*, the native peoples, and the immigrants». The pope would like to be able to offer a word of encouragement and hope to each and every family: «You families that enjoy a certain level of comfort, don’t enclose yourselves in your own satisfaction. Open yourselves to others to share that which you don’t need but which others need badly»¹¹.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

Then some very wise words from the pope: «You families oppressed by poverty, don't be discouraged. Without making luxury your ideal or wealth the basis of your happiness, join with others in seeking to overcome obstacles in the hope that better days will come. (Applause) You families afflicted by physical or moral suffering and tested by illness or misery, don't worsen the pain with bitterness or despair, but learn how to cushion the suffering with hope»¹².

Life of the church

We have seen, then, how the church and the family and God are all joined together. Since this time of reflection is a family moment for us, I now want to recall our ecclesial activities, the things we have done as a sacred people consecrated to God.

Last Sunday I blessed the church of El Calvario in Cojutepeque. It is a beautiful sanctuary that was built with the help of Miss Mercedes Barriere—may she rest in peace. It honors the Lord of Mercies, a very ancient and venerated image in that city.

The parish of El Carmen celebrated Christmas with a beautiful first communion service, mainly for poor children. It was the same in Huizúcar, first communion and confirmations.

We had the pleasure of greeting the provincial of the Augustinian Fathers, who have the parish of Miramonte and Miralvalle. We were pleased that he's happy to have priests of his congregation in that parish, which is very lively and greatly blessed by God, as he saw.

On the other hand, in Quezaltepeque the ex-priest Quinteros did not keep his promise to leave the parish on December 26. As a result, we have exhausted the peaceful measures with which we've tried to deal with him.

The priests' cooperative had its Christmas party this week.

In the pretty village of San Juan Los Planes, near a volcano in Quezaltepeque, there is a fine example of Christians working to form a base community. An engaged couple, Carlos and Rosi, have gone there to form a community and have already been working there many months. The community is clearly flourishing, and I had the good fortune of celebrating a first communion service with them. So today I present to you this example of what lay apostles can do.

Our diocese has a beautiful tradition for the feast of the Holy Innocents in Antiguo Cuscatlán, and the celebration there was quite splendid this year. Also, confirmations were celebrated in Candelaria, Cuscatlán.

In San Antonio Los Ranchos there was the traditional maize festival, and for the third time I failed them. I couldn't go, but I'm sure they'll forgive me because they understood my reasons. Generous as ever, they sent me a lovely hat made of husks and decorated with a plume of maize. At first sight, it looks like a handsome Panama hat. It's amazing what they've managed to do there with the residue of corn plants, such as husks, plumes, and cobs. Everything that is worth using is made into a work of art. I congratulate you, dear residents of San Antonio Los

¹² Ibid.

Ranchos, for your efforts to overcome poverty and for the great enthusiasm you show.
(Applause)

Along with this gift I received a very nice letter from the community of Potonico, and I find in it an example worthy of imitation in other communities. For their patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception they succeeded in separating the religious celebration from the profane festivities. (Applause) They write, «We did everything we could so that the celebration would be very solemn, and we are happy that we have been able to offer the people a true religious feast that is separate from the profane aspects that it had before». (Applause) They also thank YSAX for its radio programs, and I in turn especially thank the community because they say they like the recordings of the Sunday homily that are broadcast during the week, every day at six-thirty and eleven o'clock in the morning and at five o'clock in the afternoon.

From the community of Santa Tecla I've received a very encouraging letter, and I'm very pleased with the thought it expresses. After defining what a Christian community is, they write, «This is the context in which we view you, Archbishop, and we ask your help to coordinate all the creative forces of our commitment to proclaim Christian liberation and fraternity and to bring them about». This is a very good understanding of pastoral work, which should always remain within the sphere of the Christian without forgetting earthly commitments.

I've received letters from various communities denouncing abuses of the mass organizations, which are requiring people to join them and are issuing threats. I tell you once again: we must begin by respecting human freedom. People should not be obliged to do something that they don't want to do.

I have also received complaints about some individuals who are drawing up lists of so-called «subversives» and then saying that they're guilty of burning cane fields and of assaulting, robbing, and killing people. Such statements place the persons whose names are published on these lists in great danger. The identity of the ones publishing the lists is known, and they have been asked not to put innocent people in danger. These bad jokes can be lethal. (Applause) It's not really a matter of jokes but of some very evil tendencies.

I want to decry the destruction produced by a bomb set off in the UCA, the Universidad Centroamericana. It damaged the administration building and the computers. Let us hope that there is no other more serious damage. What we're seeing here is how irrational forces will always use brute force. (Applause) Reason should be combated with reason! (Applause)

The Holy Spirit has been performing marvels this week in Planes de Renderos. In the house of the Assumption Sisters a group of catechumen communities is engaged in a process of understanding better the meaning of Christian life. In the house of the Salesians there were three days of encounter for Renewal in the Spirit, directed by our dear friend, Bishop Malavera, who has come here from Mexico. They will have their closing act this afternoon at two-thirty in the National Gymnasium; there will be a great Eucharistic celebration with massive attendance. I invite everyone who can attend to come, so that we offer a prayer there to the Holy Spirit for our homeland.

Also, this feast of the Holy Family is a special day for the Marriage Encounter movement. They will have a Mass and a celebration tonight at eight o'clock in the church of El Carmen.

And I don't have to tell you that during this reflection I have been keeping very much in mind the young people who are attending the youth encounter at the San José de la Montaña Seminary.

Anticipating a little, I invite you to be here in the cathedral tomorrow evening at seven o'clock, for the final Mass of the year, so that we can give thanks to God and greet the new year. So be here tomorrow at seven in the evening! Those who want to attend Mass a little later can come to the Divina Providencia Hospital, where I will celebrate at eight o'clock in the evening. There also, God willing, as is our custom on the first Friday of each month—this Friday is also January first—we will have our Holy Hour at five in the afternoon, an hour when we pray for the peace of our country.

Lifting now our sight from this local church to the horizons of the planet, we see the pope giving a panoramic view of the world's reality in his end-of-year discourse. The pope first of all insisted on proclaiming that it is a duty of the church to defend the inalienable rights of individuals and communities and whole peoples. «This mission», he stated, «does not interfere in the internal affairs of states; it is a duty the Gospel requires of the church»¹³. The pope also spoke of the family, saying that in all his communications with political leaders, both in the Vatican and on his trips, he insisted on the importance of providing tangible support for families. He alluded as well to the next meeting of the synod, which will be dedicated precisely to the family¹⁴.

Referring to the world scene, the pope spoke of the American hostages being held in their embassy in Iran and said that such action was a violation of clear principles of international law. The pope also spoke out against the exorbitant price of oil, which has caused great suffering to poor people throughout the world. «The church», he said, «considers it her duty to raise her voice in defense of human rights»¹⁵. (Applause) He also said that the exorbitant oil prices are provoking in turn an increase in the price of the basic items of daily life and so cause serious problems for families and society generally¹⁶.

The pope spoke also about the troublesome conflict in the Middle East and about the dark and sinister terrorist actions in Italy and elsewhere. He made a plea to guerrilla groups to put an end to violence, and he asked for international solidarity in helping the wretched caravans of refugees¹⁷. Regarding refugees, the pope read a moving letter from someone who had firsthand experience of this reality and had written: «Before us was a camp with 235,000 persons crowded on top of one another, human outcasts, half-starved, emaciated, at the very limits of survival. We cannot describe to you the scenes of deterioration and mutilation: children with horrible wounds whose eyes no longer held tears»¹⁸. Through this eyewitness the refugees were asking the pope to pray for them. After reading the letter in Saint Peter's Square, the pope said, «This is our response», and waited deliberately for the response of the people.

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Cardinals and Prelates of the Roman Curia», 22 December 1979, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 December 1979) and *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 December 1979).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, «Allocution at the Angelus», 26 December 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 December 1979).

As you know, the pope will travel to the Philippines in February to beatify a saint of that country. At Christmastime the pope spoke about the rights and the dignity of the child: «Respect for the child should begin even before birth, from the very first moment of its conception»¹⁹. He then added, «Today, as we meditate on the newborn of Bethlehem, our hearts are turned toward all children, all young people, all those newly born of human parents, those who are still to be born and those who have already been born. ... We must ask whether the threat of wholesale extermination will continue to mount over the heads of this new generation of children»²⁰. The pope condemned the insane arms race that is taking place in countries around the world. (Applause)

The pope has given us the theme for January first, the one proposed by the previous pope, Paul VI. The pope wants January first to be celebrated as the World Day of Peace, and as Paul VI did, he is offering a theme for this year. For this first of January of 1980 the theme is «Truth, the Strength of Peace». Truth, the strength of peace.

Events of the week

As a commentary on this great idea, that there can be no strong peace if it is not sustained by truth, I want to present to you the panorama that we as church have of the country. The church as the chosen people of God looks toward the entire nation of El Salvador, and we try to analyze, in light of this principle set forth by the pope, whether truth really is for us the strength of peace. Where are the weaknesses of our peace? They are in the lies, in the hypocrisies, in the falsehoods. (Applause) We find sinful acts that are lies, for lying is a sin, but we also find, thank God, acts that point to the truth. Everything that builds up is truth, is peace. (Applause) Let us thank God that we find some positive things this week, paths that lead to peace.

First, a law has been passed that limits the abuse of free speech²¹. It was time to unmask all those anonymous persons and phantom associations that maligned individuals and institutions and stirred up hatred under the dark shield of anonymity. (Applause) We already said as much in a homily with regard to a letter we received. If we truly want to break with the past, then this is one of the most insidious threads: the communications media must give an account of the persons responsible for all the calumny. (Applause) This new law decrees that newspapers, radio newscasts, television, etc., cannot publish or broadcast anything unless they give sufficient information about the persons who authored the paid ads so that they don't go scot free.

We also consider very positive the decree that freezes rents²², and we welcome the law that prohibits lending abuses and sins of usury. (Applause) The other day we denounced the impounding of a house because of debt of 300 *colones*, and still the poor person was obliged to pay off the debt. As regards the promise of the Minister of Justice to struggle against all moral corruption, we say what we've always said: we hope that deeds follow upon the words. (Applause)

¹⁹ JOHN PAUL II, «Christmas Message», 25 December 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (30 December 1979).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Referring to Government Decree No. 67. *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 December 1979).

²² Referring to the Emergency Law on Rentals. *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 and 28 December 1979).

Other positive events—some might call them negative—are the release of some of the persons detained during the evictions and the exhumation and return to their families of the bodies that were identified. I say this also has a negative aspect because all this could have been avoided, and there should have been no need of having recourse to this. Here I want to present to you the testimony of an eyewitness from our Legal Aid Office: «On December 29 we verified the exhumation of the bodies buried in Joya de Cerén as a result of the sad and painful events that occurred last week in El Porvenir, Opico. Those present for this task were the authorities, the director of Legal Aid, and other assistants. In all there were twenty-six bodies, some of them women. Many families arrived at the site to identify their relatives. It was a gruesome scene. Some foreign journalists commented, "How beautiful the Salvadoran countryside is, but see how terribly it's used!" The sobbing mother of one of the dead *campesinos* said, "My son was looking for work, but he found death". Most of the bodies had their heads destroyed, and some of them had their pockets turned inside out, a sign that they were searched before being buried. The LP-28 denounced that the victims were robbed of their money before being buried, and they've launched a campaign asking for reparations to be paid for all the victims». (Applause)

The Legal Aid Office report continues, «On December 24 the workers Raúl Humberto Martínez and Manuel Antonio Marroquín Arteaga were buried. Raúl worked for CONELCA and Manuel for Goltree Liebes. Both were kidnapped on December 19, Raúl at his home and Manuel at his workplace, and their bodies were found on December 23 on the road to the village of Las Granadillas, in the direction of Puerto de la Libertad. Their bodies presented clear signs of physical torture: burns, broken ribs, and wounds. The previous week two union leaders from Santa Ana, Gerardo Antonio Herrera and Salvador Sánchez Hidalgo, were brutally assassinated. Also, a union leader at Tropical Embotelladora was captured and then released on December 24. This new persecution of workers, culminating in the torture and death of their leaders, contravenes the most fundamental rights of Salvadoran workers of El Salvador: the right to life, liberty, and union organization.

I've also received a telegram from the UDN Party that says, «The UDN condemns and protests the murder of Manuel Carranza Chávez, fifty-six, uncle of our colleague Mario Aguiñada Carranza, secretary-general of the UDN. On Saturday 22 December at ten o'clock, he was violently kidnapped from his home in Ayutuxtepeque and was killed in Coatepeque, where his body was found on Sunday morning. The UDN considers this crime to be still another expression of the reactionary offensive that is now underway and a direct act of aggression against our party and our companion, Mario Aguiñada». (Applause)

Legal Aid also reports as follows: «We still do not know whether they have released the *campesinos* José Rubén Abrego, Rodrigo Alvarenga, and Octavio Anduray, who were captured in Chalatenango on December 20. Nor do we know anything about the *campesino* Jorge Elio Portillo, who was captured on December 17. On December 28 of this week, Gloria Martínez, a slum resident, was captured after several poor families were dislodged from some land they had occupied near the Liceo Salvadoreño since they had no place else to live». The housing problem is serious and demands a solution that is humane and Christian. (Applause)

With regard to the situation in the slums and all the misery there, I want to congratulate the Minister of Health for the effective, rapid, and humane way in which he is dealing with the

health and hygiene problems in those marginalized zones. That's the way the complex problem of housing and slum dwellers should be dealt with. (Applause)

For all these reasons we are in accord with the note of Doctor Roberto Lara Velado. He seems to me to be speaking clearly and valiantly in his message to the Revolutionary Governing Junta:

There is no question that the difficult climate in our country has been exacerbated in recent days. Certain events have especially aroused the citizenry, with the result that the public security forces and perhaps some soldiers have caused the death of a great many citizens. This makes us believe that we have returned to the repression of previous times. It is true that it can be said that the repressive acts were provoked, but the responses to provocation should preserve some reasonable proportion to the actual events. (Applause) As a citizen I feel obliged to present my views to this honorable Junta. Moreover, when I agreed to form part of the Special Investigatory Commission for Political Prisoners and Disappeared Persons, I made known my conditions, including the cessation of all repression, and they were accepted by the Junta. Considering all this, I feel the obligation to send the present letter. I believe it is correct to say that no one wants disorder or irrational acts. Accordingly, the security agents deserve the support of all the citizenry when they limit themselves to establishing order and make use of means that are employed in all civilized countries, such as tear gas and things of that nature. I believe that crimes must be punished, but legal procedures and established penalties exist to accomplish that. Most of the offenses committed do not merit the death penalty, and so it is wrong to make use of excessive means, especially those that can cause death. For this reason I believe that it is proper that an investigation be carried out so that the citizenry learn the truth of what happened and so that those guilty of crimes be punished, whoever they may be». (Applause)

It is deeds like these that are causing El Salvador to fall into disrepute. There is no other way to explain the fact that the United States embassy is reducing its staff, except that they fear for the unclear future of El Salvador²³.

This week the Armed Forces have stated that they are not leaning to the right. The Minister of Defense stated, «We emphatically deny that the Armed Forces are becoming an instrument of the right or of the oligarchy. To the contrary, we are certain that we are making sincere efforts to interpret the general will of the people and that we are not at the service of extremist minority groups»²⁴. I would like to object to this declaration, regarding not the language of words but the language of acts. We don't want just words or good intentions; we want an investigation of the events we just mentioned, which are awash with blood and disappeared persons and kidnap victims. (Applause)

On the other hand, the demonstration on the twenty-seventh, with its grand display of propaganda and provocation and supremacy by those who want to resurrect ORDEN²⁵,

²³ *La Prensa Gráfica* (28 December 1979).

²⁴ *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 December 1979).

²⁵ General José Alberto Medrano announced that «ORDEN has changed its name to the Nationalist Democratic Front, FDN». «Message of the Nationalist Democratic Front to the Members of ORDEN» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (27 December 1979).

declared itself to be in support of the Armed Forces²⁶. I wonder what they're supporting. The sorrowful events that brought so much new bloodshed? What are they supporting? Do they want to continue defending their own economic interests, or will they support the structural changes in the country that have been announced? These are changes that all of us Salvadorans have to support if we are seeking the true good of the country. It is easy to fall into temptation, or better said, into the trap of the sirens' songs, and that is more true than ever now since there is a crisis within the government. Now more than ever the Armed Forces have the responsibility of making the proclamation of October 15 a reality in order to prevent the country from falling into a chaos with incalculable consequences.

The good of the country demands that the perilous crisis of government be resolved. It is not only the right, with its seductions and its threats, that is dangerous at this moment, even though the extreme right is certainly the greatest danger. Also extremely dangerous is the lust for power. Who knows whether that's not the root cause of this crisis: a struggle for power. All those in the government and the Armed Forces should rise above that temptation for it is dividing them, and they should be astute in uncovering the many maneuvers to which they can be subjected.

Deluded by this temptation of power, they are committing many errors, and so are the leftist groups and the people's organizations. They are losing sight of the legitimate goals of their pressure tactics, which should be the common good of the people and not sectarian fanaticism or obedience to foreign slogans.

All sides—the government, the opposition, and the extreme right—should put aside all partisanship, all fanaticism, all ambition for power and privilege, and all forms of self-seeking. They should commit themselves, as generously as they do in their personal endeavors, to the uniquely just and noble goal that we must seek as Salvadorans: the promotion of social justice for our people. This we must do in order to break down what the pope with perfect clarity has called the «the barriers of exploitation»²⁷.

I address myself very especially, then, to the members of the government and the Armed Forces, who should have as their only objective the promotion of the dignity of the people of El Salvador. And to make things quite clear, when I talk about «people», I'm talking about those who are poor and marginalized.

Now I want to reaffirm once more, sisters and brothers, within the perspective of the new year, what I said on October 16 at the time of the coup d'état. I said that I saw in the proclamation of the Revolutionary Governing Junta good intentions and clarity of vision but that it was the deeds of the junta that would show whether their intentions were true. It is the people who must judge the deeds of the government. I also said at that time that I was ready for dialogue and even for collaboration, but with one condition: that they serve the interests of the people. The service of the people is the only reason for the existence of the government and of the church in the world—they must serve the people! On that occasion those who are in perpetual opposition by profession, prejudice, or political option claimed that my words

²⁶ The march was organized by the Crusade for Peace and Work and was supported by the FDN. *La Prensa Gráfica* (28 December 1979).

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the *Campesinos* and Indigenous Peoples of Oaxaca», 29 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (11 February 1979).

showed a 180-degree turn. Again, it is deeds that will confirm the existence of good will, and I want to offer my service of dialogue and collaboration so that we can break completely with our ignominious past and erase the ugly impression that people now have: that instead of advancing, the process of reform that was begun is moving backward. Every effort must be made today to overcome the crisis, and every crisis is overcome either by dying or by living. So the present moment is supremely important, and we must meet its challenge as people of good will, as a civilized nation.

«Truth is the power of peace» were the pope's words. In the name of the Gospel of peace I ask that we all work together in truth and sincerity. Let us not just utter words and make promises; let us truly work hard so that what we know we must do and can do for the good of the country becomes a reality.

Finally, in this family setting I want to address those who are absent from their families, the kidnap victims. Or rather, I want to address those who hold them captive: let them go free so that they can feel the happiness of their families! Specifically, I have a special message concerning the kidnapping of Archibald Dunn, the former ambassador of South Africa. The conditions you have laid down for his release seem impossible. It would be good to make the negotiations more reasonable. Agree to conditions that can perhaps be fulfilled, and don't insist on one that simply cannot be met. One matter is very urgent: I am authorized to offer the services of a doctor to this beloved kidnap victim, the former ambassador of South Africa. I therefore beg those who are holding him captive to allow him to be seen by this doctor, who nobly wants to visit the ex-ambassador. I offer my services if they are needed. So I say again: I'm at your orders.

Sisters and brothers, this is our family. We are a family that journeys in the world and has also sorts of members, but from our Christian perspective we feel that we are a nucleus very close to God. We are the small church in the home and the great universal church in the world. We are parish, diocese, base community. Let us live intensely, then, on this day when the liturgy offers us the magnificent message of the Holy Family. Let all of us, having each our special place in the universal family, feel like sisters and brothers, and let us collaborate with all our other sisters and brothers to make this world not a madhouse of fear but a paradise and entryway for the children of God. Let it be so! (Applause)