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## **THE MISSIONARY CHURCH**

**Thirtieth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**World Mission Sunday**

**23 October 1977**

*Isaiah 60:1-6*

*Romans 10:9-18*

*Matthew 28:16-20*

My dear sisters and brothers and radio audience, today we celebrate the World Day of Missions. We should all feel that we are living members of a people that have been charged by God to bring his light to all the inhabitants of earth. But this people of God becomes concrete in each community; it lives in concrete history and specific circumstances, and it is from these that we must be missionaries. Therefore, even though it may seem tedious, I always recount a little of our history and explain the environment in which we, the people of God that is the Archdiocese of San Salvador, must move with all our concerns and concrete problems.

### **Events of the week**

All of us know, for example, that tomorrow is Hospital Day. The feast of the archangel Rafael, whose name means «medicine of God», is celebrated on October 24, and that has given rise to this wonderful tradition in El Salvador of celebrating Hospital Day. Thus, we extend our love and understanding to all those who are ill in our hospitals and also to the doctors, the nurses, and their collaborators who have centered their lives on the human suffering of those men and women of whom Christ says, «All that you do for them you do for me» (Matt 25:40).

We also lament that there is no end to the strikes and demonstrations on behalf of the rights of workers. These are a sign of the sad situation that the church denounces. Those in charge of seeking the common good must urgently seek the causes of the problems in mutual dialogue with the interested parties. The church also generously offers her insights, which come from a doctrine rooted in the Gospel; without such a doctrine we will always have these outbreaks of discontent. The evil is deeply rooted in El Salvador, and if we are not serious about curing it, then we will only be changing names, and the same evil will continue. In this regard, I have been asked to inform you that the occupation of the lands in Azacualpa cannot be resolved. There were several dialogues in July, August, September, and even now in October, but despite the hopeful promises made during these dialogues, there is always retraction; there is always further consultation; there is always some opinion that prevents a peaceful settlement. We do not want the sad history of Aguilares to be repeated in Azacualpa. Therefore, it falls upon the authorities who are competent in such matters to resolve these situations in a just manner. I know for sure that those who occupy the lands are not usurpers.

They do not want to steal the land. They are respectful of private property. They want only to come to an understanding so that they can have land on which to plant their crops and provide food and nourishment for their families. I am not an expert in these matters, as I have said before. The church is not competent to say what should be done, but by the light of the Gospel she calls upon those who are competent and can with authority move things forward through dialogue to act justly and to resolve these problems that are tumors revealing the infirmity of our country.

Several mothers, wives, and relatives have approached the chancery asking whether it is true that a commission is coming to investigate human rights and whether they can speak directly with the commission. All we can say is that, if it is true that a commission is coming, then it should act justly and enter into direct dialogue with the interested persons. There are many families that have much to say in this regard.

I also want to denounce a biased survey done by the national university. In our weekly publication, *Orientación*,<sup>1</sup> you can see an example of how a so-called philosophy is not really love of knowledge, as its etymology implies, but rather a perverse way of discrediting the church. They conducted a survey that was orientated to promoting greater hatred and defamation of our church. I call this to your attention so that you don't allow yourselves to be guided by pseudo-scientists, the blind leading the blind.

Also there is something I didn't inform you about because I had not received authoritative information. During the final days of September the church held a meeting to analyze the law called FOCCO.<sup>2</sup> There came together forty-four organizations of Christian inspiration, both Protestant and Catholic, all of them working for the development of our people, especially those in the countryside. These organizations see in this new law a danger of monopoly; they fear Christian inspiration will be suppressed and a single political ideology will be imposed on these organizations which the church, like any other entity or individual, has the right to organize. The right to organize is a basic human right, especially since the church has been commanded by Christ to carry her evangelical promotion to all sectors of our people. We do not want to have to complain about interference in the rights of the holy church. We have already had to complain too often.

## **News of the church**

For her part, our church, as she brings the message of mission to all parts of the world, tries to keep improving the organization of our archdiocese. Given the departure of Bishop Rivera, who at 10 o'clock on the morning of November 5 will take possession of Santiago de María, it was necessary to name a vicar general, who is the person who helps the bishop guide the diocese in its most important aspects. Monsignor Ricardo Urioste has been named to this position for now; he is well known by the priests for his work in those jurisdictional problems of the whole diocese.

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<sup>1</sup> «On Diverse Matters: Philosophy at the National University» in *Orientación* (25 October 1977).

<sup>2</sup> The *Ley de Fomento y Cooperación Comunal* (FOCCO), the Law for Communal Promotion and Cooperation, was promulgated by the legislative assembly on 28 October 1976 with the aim of regulating the organization and functioning of associations for communal development.

Reviewing our vicariates, we are delighted with the vicariate of Asunción, which includes the whole western part of the capital. The pastors, following the guidelines of the archdiocese, are developing a joint pastoral ministry among the vital forces of the whole vicariate, which in that sector are admirable, including many schools and other independent institutions. Thanks be to God, all these groups have responded to the call. We hope that these parishes, as the places where the church must communicate her authentic message of the Gospel, will find many pastoral agents among the priests, the religious, and the faithful. All should understand that they are not just pastors or members of some social institution, but rather they are church. They must therefore coordinate their ideas with the bishop and with the pastoral plan of the archdiocese. I am very happy, and I congratulate them. I hope that these meetings bring about a unity of criteria in our diocese so that we don't present a spectacle of two churches—because there is only one church, that of the Gospel of Christ.

In the vicariate of Cuscatlán we had the good fortune of hearing the voice of Bishop Chávez, who as you know was archbishop for thirty-eight years and who now, in a humble and generous gesture, is serving the parish of Suchitoto. The pastors of that vicariate had a meeting with him and have shared some wonderful moments together; that meeting was also broadcast by radio. I want to take advantage of this opportunity to offer a new testimony of admiration and affection for this man who is our beloved predecessor. Also in Cuscatlán they are preparing for a convention of the Knights of Christ the King in Cojutepeque next Sunday at 3:00 o'clock in the afternoon.

We also have interesting news about the pastoral progress that is being made in the vicariate of Chalatenango, which is now under the direction of an episcopal vicar. One of the nicest things in the vicariate this week was the corn festival, which is being celebrated this weekend. There they have developed a very interesting industry with corn products, with husks, with leaves, etc., and we have seen some beautiful examples of their work. It is worthwhile getting to know this industry, which is well organized, especially in San Antonio Los Ranchos in the vicariate of Chalatenango.

My recent visits have been motivated by the installation of new pastors and other pastoral needs, but I have also had the joy of moments of solidarity with the communities of Ayutuxtepeque, Candelaria, Colonia Dolores, and Colonia Luz. In one place I met with a very interesting community of women who work in the market and who are now participating in a course to help them improve their businesses. I am delighted that this sector of market vendors has found active apostles who give true divine value to this difficult work where they are exposed to so many difficulties, for our markets are of great value to our society.

I also want to congratulate the seminary, with which I am very happy. This week, along with their bishop, the seminarians of the archdiocese who are studying philosophy and theology evaluated their spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral formation. It was a hope-filled afternoon, dear sisters and brothers, and speaking to you as God's people, I want to tell you that it is worthwhile to promote the formation of these young men, for they will be the successors of the current priests who work so hard in the pastoral ministry of the archdiocese in these difficult times. The seminary gives us hope. I also want to inform you that the vocational campaign of Father Segura is quite successful. He himself has told me that the success is not due to human merit but rather

is a blessing that God grants our archdiocese at this time. We already have nine candidates, besides many others who will study in the minor seminary. We have had to reject or postpone the acceptance of many young men who, given the present situation of the church, have once more borne witness to the immortal phrase of Tertullian: «The blood of the martyrs is the seed for vocations, the seed of Christianity, the seed that gives growth to the church».<sup>3</sup> Those who persecute the church do not understand how much good that they have done for her by wonderfully watering and cultivating this awakening of our church, which is especially seen in the many promising vocations.

I also want to thank the laity who are working with the hierarchy so that we become more functional and more effective in our church governance.

My sisters and brothers, forgive me for dragging out these news items, but the church cannot ignore the concrete reality as it proclaims the word. Otherwise, we run the danger of announcing an ethereal gospel that has no projection to history and to earth. Given the difficult environment of the archdiocese, we can now understand the meaning of this World Mission Sunday. In the three readings today we find three thoughts that will once again sketch out in our minds that figure of the missionary church that I have presented several times before.

In the first place what are the missions? The Second Vatican Council's document on the missions, which the pope has called to our attention in his message for Mission Sunday, explains to us that the missions are primarily an endeavor to go forth and evangelize, to establish the church of Christ in those communities and lands where the church does not yet exist. I repeat, then, that the concept of mission is this: communicating the Gospel message and organizing the church in those countries or communities which have no organized church (AG 6).

Therefore the church in her great work of evangelization is divided into two sectors. First, there is the organized church. El Salvador, for example, has five dioceses, and its evangelization is well organized. The institutional church is visible and alive. There are five dioceses and no mission territories in El Salvador. On the other hand, those territories where no diocese has been organized are called mission territories. In Central America, for example, Nicaragua and Costa Rica have territories that still have no diocese. In distant countries there are vast areas where the missionaries are directly dependent on the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. That is the name of the department which helps the pope in this task of bringing the Gospel to the whole world. This Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples has a cardinal in charge and a number of personnel. There are missionaries both in the Holy See and in the mission territories who work to organize the church in those countries. And so that is where we direct our thoughts this morning: to those missions where men and women—priests and religious and laity—are trying to bring the news of the Gospel and to organize their own hierarchy, with their own bishops and their own priests. They are trying to organize the church as an institution that will continue proclaiming the Gospel as it does here in El Salvador through her bishops and her parishes.

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<sup>3</sup> TERTULLIAN, *Apologetics*, 50,13.

These are the missions, but they are not some invention of our own times, as the word of God instructs us today in our three readings. Isaiah, seven centuries before Christ, had a vision of the universality of God's kingdom. Saint Paul writes to the Romans, telling them that organizing the church as an institution is useless if there is no change of heart in those who call themselves Christians. Saint Matthew's Gospel, which was just read, tells us that Christ himself founded an instrument called the church in order to bring about both the universal reach of the kingdom of God and the inner conversion of people's hearts. These are the three aspects of this Mission Sunday that I discover in today's readings.

### **A vision of the universality of God's kingdom**

First of all, Isaiah presents us with the beautiful panorama we have heard. Darkness covers the earth; confusion reigns in the world where God has not shed his light. Then in Jerusalem the people behold a light, not a light coming from outside, but rather a God who becomes incarnate in Jerusalem and makes Jerusalem a light that illuminates the paths of history and the world. Along these roads illumined by God travel all the world's peoples, bringing their tribute so as to form one single kingdom, the kingdom of God. What a beautiful poem! (Isa 60:1-6). This was not invented by some poet but by the mind of God, for he did not create different races and peoples so that they would be confounded by their diversity of languages and unable to understand one another, nor did he create social diversity so as to marginalize some people while others lived well. What God wanted was to make the whole world a great community.

But the world by itself will not achieve this goal. In the world there is only darkness and confusion. We have only to look at the situation in our own country: when the light of God is extinguished, what remains? Abductions, hatred, torture, violence, a very sad panorama. When God has not visited Jerusalem, everything becomes confusion, darkness, fear, and terror. The same can be said of other peoples when God abandons them because they have not been worthy of him. God must come and shed light. That is what mission is about. Mission comes from a Latin word that means «sent»—mittere—because the Son is sent by God. And when the Son who was sent has redeemed the world and has taught it his doctrine, he returns to the Father, and then the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit.

In this way the church is the product of a twofold sending, a twofold mission that originates in the heart of God. First is the sending of God's Word made flesh, Christ our Redeemer whom God has made the head of the human race. «When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself», said Christ (John 12:32). When Christ completed his work with a small group in the Holy Land, he left them, but he told them, «I will send you the Spirit who will teach you the truth and will guide you through all the ways of the world. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you with the strength of my Spirit. Go then into the whole world, travel along all the pathways in all ages, and teach people to keep the precepts I have taught you. Those who receive you will be saved, and those who do not receive you will be condemned» (John 14:26; Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:16). Here you have the great mission: the Son is sent by the Father; the Holy Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son; the church is sent by Christ: «As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you» (John 20:21). Missionaries are those who are sent.

What happens to the world then? It begins to experience a light like the one prophesied by Isaiah (Isa 60:1). There is no longer darkness. Those peoples who receive this light of Christ begin to feel related to one another. Pope Paul VI in his beautiful message on evangelization says that when people accept the message of Christ, they form a community in order to live this message. From the life in community they feel the urge to carry the same message to others (EN 15). This is the mission that we are carrying out here in the cathedral. It is truly moving to see the cathedral filled at this moment with faithful who have come from so many places and parish communities. We are evangelizing one another. At this moment I have the good fortune of being a missionary to this community, but you, upon receiving my message, are not going to keep it selfishly for yourselves or your community or family. I know that many communities are arising from here and from wherever they are hearing my message by radio. When I finish speaking, those communities will sit down and analyze what I have said, evangelizing one another, delving deeper into the message, and coining phrases to take that same light to their relatives and the whole village.

That is why the church is grieved, sisters and brothers, when she encounters obstacles in spreading this light, when her mission is seen as suspect, or when it is confused with other missions that are subversive and revolutionary. What we proclaim is the light of God which the people need. Subversive and revolutionary activities extinguish the light of God; they do not allow Christ's message of love to circulate freely; instead, they sow hatred and violence. Still, I experience profound joy as I see the community of the archdiocese being evangelized as it receives the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit through the church which keeps on speaking to the people.

Accordingly, sisters and brothers, this church that receives the light of God is not passive. Notice how beautiful Isaiah's description is: «Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you: your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses. . . . Camel caravans cover your roads» (Isa 60:4,6). The ancient means of communication, such as those used by Saint Paul and the first Christians, have now become modern means of communication: radio, airplanes, automobiles. Using these, today's missionaries travel to the missions and come back from them bringing the gifts of Midian and Ephah (Isa 60:6). They bring gifts not only from the East, like the kings who came to adore the Child Jesus (Matt 2:1), but from all peoples of the world. This is why the church is so beautiful, sisters and brothers. The church is a combination of organized dioceses, and each diocese contributes its particular value, its indigenous value. The church does not stifle initiatives.

I just mentioned the corn festival in San Antonio de los Ranchos. This is really a missionary scene: it is the church telling those who plant corn how they can do so in the light of the Gospel, how they can brighten their paths of sadness with the joy of a festival that arises from the fruits of our earth. Likewise, in Africa and in Asia the church discovers the values of the native cultures; she does not destroy them as colonizers in the past did when they abolished the values of the indigenous peoples. The church is not a colonizer. The church inspires the values that exist at all latitudes of the earth.

So we bring our gifts in the offertory of the Mass: «Lord, receive this bread and this wine, fruit of the earth and work of human hands». In this way esteem is shown for the hands that labor to give us life. How much hard work, how many values I see in your

hands, dear Catholics! Some work with silver, others with wood; some cultivate the land; others knead the dough to give us food; still others administer the goods that are sold in the market. How beautiful is humankind! This is what the Lord wants: that caravans of camels and other means of transport bring all these gifts to the altar so that the priest can raise them to God with the bread and wine. In this way the work of earth, transformed into the Body of the Lord, becomes divine. This is what the church does: she gives divine value to human values; out of the whole diocese she brings about a harmony that no other empire has achieved, only the empire of God.

That is why it is ridiculous, sisters and brothers, that the church is seen as suspect. I repeat for you the phrase I recalled last Sunday from the hymn sung on the feast of the adoration of the magi. When Herod heard that another king had been born, he was jealous and feared that this new king would take away his political power, but the church sings to him, «Do not be afraid, Herod, for he comes not to take away your temporal powers but to give you eternal kingdoms».⁴ Ah, if only governments understood that the church does not come as a sort of political competitor to take away from them their people and their *campesinos*. Not at all. Rather, the church comes to inject new life into their people, their political power, their social power, all their technology; she seeks to give them all a Christian meaning so that they will be more just, more loyal, more noble—so that both those who govern and those who are governed will be better people. From the heart of the Gospel the church preaches true peace and true justice, but people don't want to listen. The church is maligned as Christ was maligned, not for preaching subversion but for wanting a better, more just social order. In her missions the church does nothing but bring divine value to all that is human.

## **Conversion of heart**

In the second reading Saint Paul tells the Romans that his preaching will be useless unless their hearts are converted. Saint Paul writes in a context where his preaching has already been heard. We might say that he is preaching to the Salvadoran nation where all have heard his preaching. «Have they not heard?» asks Saint Paul (Rom 10:18). Certainly they have heard! The word of the Gospel is heard throughout the earth, but people don't want to believe in their hearts. So it is not enough just to have an organization of external structures. The Medellín document states that as long as this continent does not have new people we will not have a new order (M 1,3). There is the need to believe, says Saint Paul, because only faith in God saves (Rom 10:10).

The liberation preached by the church is based on this belief in God. Liberation will not be achieved by the efforts of men and women. Let us not fool ourselves! Liberation comes only from God, but it depends on the conversion of people's hearts. It is useless for God to offer us his redemption, his liberation, and a better world if those who are charged with building this world on earth refuse to collaborate with God.

Here then we see the need for the missionary. Saint Paul concludes with a beautiful argument: «How can they hear without someone to preach? And how can they preach unless they are sent?» (Rom 10:14-15). This is mission. The church has a constitution that is much more solid than all the constitutions of nations. The

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<sup>4</sup> Hymn for Vespers on the feast of the Epiphany.

constitutions that rule the lives of nations have been composed by legislators. A constitutional assembly produces laws that are often changed at the whim of rulers. In contrast, the constitution that Christ gave us at the solemn moment of his departure from earth is rooted in God: «All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. In the name of this power, go and preach this conversion» (Matt 28:18-19).

My dear Protestant sisters and brothers, this is where you are at fault. I esteem you greatly because you have come to me and expressed feelings of solidarity, but I feel that you do not share the same sense of mission which we Catholics know we have through our pastors. Yes, we admire your Gospel. The Gospel you preach is the same one we preach, and for that reason we feel close to you. But what we would like, dear Protestant friends, is that instead of having so many sects preaching true Christianity we would all make an effort to unite in the only mission Christ gave us, to be «one flock and one shepherd» (John 10:16). Our aim is not to submit all the sects to Catholic domination. I already said that the church is not imperialist, but it is true that the church's truth will spread throughout the world only when the world sees that we Christians are united. Whatever the obstacles to the evangelization of the world, one of the greatest obstacles is created by our division, dear Protestant brothers and sisters, and by those Catholics who are also divided. Division, both in the church and among Protestant sects, is an obstacle to the reign of Christ. That is why we pray, and I know that you also pray, dear Protestant sisters and brothers, that sublime prayer of Christ: «Father, I pray that those who believe in me may be united so that the world may believe that you sent me» (John 17:21).

There will be conversion in the intimacy of each person's heart only when we no longer profess a Christianity based on self-interest. Some say, «I stay in this sect because it is to my interest; since this way of belief is to my liking, I refuse to accept the authentic Gospel which appears to me to be Marxism. It is preaching social justice, and that doesn't suit me, so I say the bishop is wrong and certain priests are revolutionaries». In this way we are sowing division instead of uniting together in authentic, humble conversion of heart. We all need to be converted. I who preach to you am the first one who needs to be converted. I pray to God so that he may enlighten my paths so that I do not say or do things that are against his will. I need to be converted to what God wants. I need to speak what God wants me to speak, not what suits certain sectors or what suits me, if it is against the Lord's will. We must be converted to this mission of Christ: «Go through all the world, and preach the things I have preached to you. Whoever believes will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned» (Mark 16:15-16). There is no salvation other than that brought by Christ. That is why we all need conversion: Catholics, Protestants, and atheists too. All those seeking salvation will find it nowhere but in God.

### **The mission of the church**

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, let us pay respect to the last reading. In the gospel Christ our Lord simply confirms what I have been telling you about the church's constitution. The mission begun by Christ and then continued by the Holy Spirit is alive today in 1977 even though twenty centuries have passed, thanks to the church which is the Body of Christ in history. That is the title I gave to my second pastoral letter: «The Church is the Body of Christ in History». The church is the emissary of Christ and the

Holy Spirit to people of every age. And today we want to know what Christ would say to Salvadorans, to rich and poor, to those governing and those governed. We do not have to bring the literal Gospel of twenty centuries ago, but the Gospel that the church, rooted in that Gospel of Christ, keeps applying to the circumstances of every era. Fidelity to that Gospel and that mission constitutes the ongoing task of the church's mission. The church is missionary. As the pope recently said, it is not a question of taking Christ's message to ever more far-flung geographical regions, but of immersing modern cultures, modern industries, the people of today, in the Gospel of Christ.

Last night at a beautiful graduation ceremony I spoke to the students of the Salesian Technical School—the church of María Auxiliadora was packed. I told these young people:

The church is not going to take away your culture or your technology. She is the first to respect the autonomy of all cultures and all technologies. But I do want to tell you, as a message from the church: do not boast only of your technical knowledge; boast also of having been educated in a Catholic school and having been given Christian inspiration for all that you are going to do and to be in the world. Do not follow the old civilization that values you for the things that you possess. Today people have value not for what they own but for who they are. People are truly human to the degree that they are Christian; all of us become real to the extent that we model the Son of Man, Christ our Lord. Christ left us this church so that people of every age would model their lives on him.

Listening to the church, I listen to Christ. Receiving the Eucharist from a priest, I receive Christ. When I bring a newborn child to the priest to be baptized, it is Christ who baptizes. When I hear the word of God broadcast today on the radio, it is Christ who is continuing his preaching.

My brothers and sisters, how beautiful is our church! She continues to carry on the mission that brought the truth and life of God to all people. As Saint Paul has said, «Blessed are those who believe in their hearts. If you believe, you will be saved» (Rom 10:9).

Dear sisters and brothers, these are the reflections that occur to me on this World Day of Missions. Now we are the ones who must form this concrete church: I as your bishop; my beloved collaborators, the pastors in each parish; and you concrete men and women who have come to the cathedral Mass or who are reflecting with us through this radio broadcast. We are all the church of today. We have been entrusted with this mission of bringing this truth and this life to those who do not believe. How many people, perhaps in our family or in our own neighborhood, need us as missionaries? And even there on the mission frontiers where the church is not organized, our collaboration is needed. That is why the World Day of Missions announces to us who have the grace of believing that we should thank God for giving us this light, but that we should try to translate it into our lives so that we can collaborate in bringing light to those poor people who are still in darkness. That is why we must now stretch out our hands as beggars.

Today I have the pleasure of being a beggar for the missions. Above all, I ask for your prayers. The missions are a work that consists of converting people to faith in

Christ. It is a work that requires us to pray for the perseverance of those many heroic missionaries who must often feel discouraged in those non-Christian surroundings. So first I ask for your prayers and sacrifices. Pray continually for the missionaries and for those who do not yet know Christ. Also, sisters and brothers, I extend my hand to ask for money. It seems outrageous to extend my hand to ask for alms from a people as poor as ours, but I do not ask you for the millions that people in the United States could give. I ask you for the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4). With this money we will not resolve the problems, but it will express our solidarity and love. My donation manifests the gratitude I feel to God because he has given me faith, and I want to share my small earnings with the missionaries who give not just some coins but their whole lives. I may be unable to go on the missions, but perhaps there is a son or a daughter, some young person who has a missionary calling. It may not be for a lifetime, but they can offer to serve for five or ten years. Perhaps I cannot do even this, but I can certainly give up some little delicacy for today or maybe even something I need. If you would go without food by giving something, then please don't give. Offer the Lord your good will. But if you can give something, please do.

My sisters and brothers in the cathedral and in the communities listening on the radio, the time of the mission collection has arrived. Just as our archdiocese contributes her unique values to the universal church, so today it also contributes its money, its prayers, and its sacrifice so that this mission of establishing the kingdom of God in other lands may become a reality. Let us help the missions.