

THE CHURCH, BODY TO TRANSMIT CHRIST

Feast of St Joseph, Quezaltepeque
December 19, 1977

My beloved brother priests, dear Catholics of Quezaltepeque and other communities who have made this gesture of coming together on the feast day of the parish of Quezaltepeque to honor Saint Joseph:

All the Catholics, people of Quezaltepeque, have had the happy idea of celebrating the feast of Saint Joseph so close to the feast of Christmas. We know that the Universal Church celebrates this feast on March 19th, but the people here in Quezaltepeque want to highlight this feast and so have placed their celebration of Saint Joseph's day close to the celebration of the birth of Christ in the manger. This actually coincides with a great idea of Pope Pius IX who during the last century chose the month of December, in fact the 8th of December, to put the Universal Church under the patronage of Saint Joseph. Thus we are celebrating this anniversary of the patronage and protection of Saint Joseph of this Church that was founded by Christ. We were reminded of this just a few moments ago as we prayed the following words: *Father, you entrusted our Savior to the care of Saint Joseph'*... (Sacramentary, Opening Pray for March 19th, the feast of Saint Joseph, husband of Mary). As we celebrate this feast today, let us draw near to the beginnings of our redemption for at the beginning of our Christian redemption we find the two protagonists of our redemption: Jesus and Mary.

These two people that I have just mentioned, the two greatest people who ever lived on earth, are the origins of this spring that in Bethlehem began to grow into a river that is now an unfailing stream that brings salvation to humanity. Saint Joseph was placed as the guardian of this river that was born. It is only right that in these modern times, when this fountain has become a great river, that the Universal Church should remind the people of our time of the importance of Saint Joseph's role within the Church. The origins of this Church are dominated by two names: Jesus and Mary. As we all know Saint Joseph has a unique relationship with each of these two people. For Mary Saint Joseph was her husband. Those of you who have the dignity of being a husband, reflect on what it means to be the husband in a home, the father of a family. This is Saint Joseph's role not only for the Holy Family but for the family that has grown into the great family of God.

The Second Vatican Council calls Mary, the wife of Saint Joseph, the beginning and the model of the Church (a). Look at the beautiful description of the blessed woman, *beginning and model*. This means that the Church that desires to work throughout the centuries with all those people who believe in Christ must appear like Mary. Mary is the first Christian. Mary is the model of a gospel that becomes life. Mary is the ideal of the Church. How much the Church desires in her work with people to make all men and women appear like Mary, the model person who allowed herself to be redeemed, the model person who says to God as he presents his plan of salvation: *Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word* (b). It was for the same reason that Mary was taken body and soul into heaven to be constituted there as the beginning of that Church that we are all going to build when we die and are saved and when after the Final Judgment our bodies and souls are also there with Mary. Mary is the first stone of that glorious edifice upon which God is going to build his temple for all eternity. Thus Mary is the beginning and the model that the Church

has before her eyes in order to engrave on the hearts of all Christians the image into which Christ the Redeemer has desired to form all those who are saved.

Mary is called the *prima redenta*, the first person to be redeemed, the model of all those redeemed, the one who has been redeemed *par excellence*, the most beautiful flower of redemption, the abundance of the crucified Christ on the cross. The blood of Christ could not spring forth from a more beautiful rock than Mary, his own mother. The blessed woman, who is going to be the beginning and the model of all those who want to be saved, hands herself over to Saint Joseph as his wife. I ask those who in their homes have this dignity of being wives and mothers to meditate on the fact that your experience as noble wives in your homes is the same as Mary's. In the home of the children of God you are the counselor, the conscience, the source of love and tenderness. All that is of value in a wife, in a home, and in the mother of a home --- this is what Mary is to the Church and she is the wife of Saint Joseph.

Now we can somewhat understand the dignity of this man and the confidence that God placed in him when he entrusted to his care such a delicate and gracious woman --- truly the jewel of humanity. Mary, the most noble of human persons, hands herself over to Joseph in order to be cared for and protected. The other person who was placed under the protection of Saint Joseph is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

In yesterday's readings Saint Paul told us (c) that this Christ, as a son of Mary and a descendant of David is a son of David as stated in the gospel. But the dignity of Jesus did not just depend on that fact, rather Jesus was anointed through the virginal conception, Mary carried in her womb a man who was at the same time also God. Thus Jesus is the only son of a woman who had no natural father here on earth. At the time when the angel announced all of this to Mary, she said: *How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?* (d). The angel responded: *The fruit of your womb is not any man, rather the one to whom you will give birth is holy, anointed by the Holy Spirit and will be the fruit of a miracle by the One for whom nothing is impossible. The same One who made it possible for your cousin Elizabeth, elderly and sterile, to be the mother of the Precursor will make you, as a virgin and thus, without having relations with a man, able to have a son because this Son comes anointed by a miracle of God. Your child will be called the son of the Most High, the Son of God, Christ the Redeemer and he who will forgive the sins of all people* (e).

What a great glory for Mary to have such a son and this child, with no natural father, will be called the child of Joseph. What more beautiful praise could be given to Saint Joseph than Mary's words of complaint when she found the child Jesus in the Temple: *Son why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety* (f). Joseph and Mary knew that Jesus was not a natural son of Joseph and Joseph knew and respected the virginal conception of Jesus. Nevertheless, Mary says to Jesus: *your father and I...* What an honor for Saint Joseph! As the Eternal Father can say to Jesus: *You are my beloved Son* (g), so, too, Joseph can say: *You are my son.* And the Son who so many times said in prayer *Father* to his heavenly Father, I imagine on so many occasions called Joseph: papa, father. How beautiful is the relationship between Joseph and Jesus!

And it follows, my dear sisters and brothers, that just as Mary is the model for the whole Church who continues to live on throughout its history, so too Jesus is a son of Joseph who is prolonged in his Church. Here is what I would like us to focus on my dear children of Quezaltepeque. I would like us to focus on this concept that Joseph, being the legal father of

Jesus, assures that Christ is prolonged in his Church and experiences that all of us, as Christians, are also his children. We are under the protection of Saint Joseph and he cares for us, his Church, with the same kindness and in the same way that he cared for Jesus in the workshop in Nazareth. My sisters and brothers, I would like you to engrave this mystery in the depths of your being during this Mass which we celebrate in honor of Saint Joseph. The Second Vatican Council defines the Church in the following way: *Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains here on earth His holy Church, the community of faith, hope and charity, as an entity with visible delineation through which He communicated truth and grace to all. But, the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities.* (h). I am going to repeat these concepts that here become the essence of my poor message: Christ, the one Mediator, established and continually sustains the Church as a hierarchical society through which he communicates his truth and life. Thus my three points are the following: 1) the Church is a hierarchical society; 2) the Church communicates the truth of Christ; 3) the Church is an instrument through which Christ communicates his life.

The Church is a hierarchical society

When we refer to the Church as a hierarchical society we mean that the Church is a visible society that has pastors whom the people follow and obey. We serve the people and it is for this reason that we have desired to give a hierarchical meaning to this parish Mass. I have wanted to be with you in my role as Archbishop of the Archdiocese and also wanted to be together with my beloved brothers and collaborators: the priests. These men and I represent the hierarchical authority, the center of unity, and are the instruments that Christ uses to communicate his truth and life. Everyone who desires to live this truth and life of Christ has to be in communion with this hierarchical society. Christ speaks and communicates his life through the preaching of the bishops and priests who are in communion with the bishop.

When a priest breaks this communion with the bishop,² he is no longer an instrument of the hierarchy and as a result is no longer a living member of this life that communicates the truth and life of our Lord, Jesus Christ. More serious still is the situation of that priest who not only breaks this unity with the bishop but also with the Church. By his actions this person has excommunicated himself, like one who touches high tension wires --- no one but that individual is burned. Thus those who disconnect themselves and are excommunicated no longer have this connection with the hierarchical body. My sisters and brothers, naturally the truth and the life of Christ will be given to every person of good will and therefore even though one is living as a Protestant or a member of some other religion, such people can be saved when they live in this religion with good faith. But when this good faith is not present, when one is consciously making war with the bishop and others become part of this war, then we can no longer speak of good faith because this group of women and men have become instruments of a priest who has separated himself from the hierarchical unity. They are no longer living the truth and the life that Christ brought to the world but rather they are living according to their own whims and their own separation from the communion of the Church.

My sisters and brothers, let us live this unity that the Church gives us, a gift that comes not from herself, but from our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church does not give anything but rather is like a canal or an electrical wire. The canal is connected to the source of water and brings water --- the pipe does not bring water but rather the fountain that uses this pipe to bring water. In the same way it is not the wire that brings electrical current but rather the

wires are connected to generators that convert the current into light for our houses and electrical energy for our electrical appliances. Thus the hierarchy of the bishop with his priests ought to be connected with the source, with the dynamos that give life. When they are disconnected it is like a pipe that is disconnected from the fountain or an electrical wire that is separated from the dynamo --- a wire without current, a pipe without water. Thus we are referring to schism that occurs when people separate themselves from the hierarchical body that Christ desires to use in order to communicate his truth and life. My sisters and brothers, this is primary and therefore on this feast of Saint Joseph I ask you, my beloved Catholics, to gather more firmly around this hierarchical body. Let us be more solidly united with our pastors as the pastors are united with their bishop.

Last week we had a clergy meeting and I want to tell you, my sisters and brothers, that I was greatly satisfied when I listened to such profound and solid words from my beloved priests who said: *Everyone who is with the Bishop is with us!* I want to thank my beloved priests who are present here and through them I want to thank the whole Archdiocese, for this communion that they expressed last Thursday has provided me with a powerful stimulus and I can tell you once again that I feel very united to all the priests who are so nobly in communion with their bishop and I want to feel this way with the communities that I am visiting. May all of them express their solidarity, not to me personally, for I am a human person, like that pipe or that electrical wire, but this pipe and electrical wire want to be connected and to be with Christ and with all those who are in solidarity with me in order to communicate to you the truth and life of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

The Church communicates the truth about Christ

Thus, my sisters and brothers, my second idea revolves around the fact that this hierarchical unity does not exist for itself but to give the truth and life to people. Let us speak about the truth. The truth only exists in communion with the magisterium of the Church, the truth revealed by God. Therefore maintain yourselves always united in the truth that the Church preaches. My sisters and brothers, today it is very dangerous because some people have tagged us with the name communist and tell us that we are subversive and that we have meddled in politics. In this way they attempt to discredit the truth of the Church. These wretched ones are like the Pharisees who will hear the terrible curse that Jesus pronounces: *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter it* (i).

My sisters and brothers, be very careful and do not allow yourselves to be seduced. God knows that you have criteria, that is, he knows that you are able to think, so do not allow yourselves to be seduced by lies even when these lies might be politically, socially or economically convenient. Look at how many people sell out the truth for some lowly position that is given to them and that enables them to denounce or condemn or discredit the Church. We see this occurring in our newspapers and radio broadcasts where paid campaigns discredit the Church. The truth is not important to these people and the only thing that matters is the money that they are able to obtain. For thirty pieces of silver Judas betrayed the truth of the divine Teacher.(j) My sisters and brothers, be careful! I do not want to see anyone here in Quezaltepeque betray the truth, rather I want to see men and women who, like the martyrs, are firm in the Truth even if people will take your life. This is the Truth --- that God will give eternal life to those who lose their life here on earth. God will give us a happiness that is far superior to the happiness that the powerful of this world offer. Therefore

let no one sell themselves for any reason. The truth is superior and it must be preserved for this is the faith that Jesus spoke about when he said that those who offer their lives for this truth will find their life and those who are ashamed of this truth will lose their lives (k).

There is no advantage or value in being well off in this world if one betrays Jesus and his Church. There is no advantage if one sells oneself so cheaply because ultimately one will lose one's life. Indeed, it is terrible to hear these words from Jesus' lips: *Whoever denies me before others, I will deny before my heavenly Father* (l).

The Church is Christ's instrument to communicate his life

Finally, my sisters and brothers, the Church that Saint Joseph cares for and that through the hierarchy communicates the truth --- this Church also communicates the Life. How beautiful it is to see before me a child who is going to receive first Communion, going to receive the Life because one has already received Confirmation and Baptism. The sacraments that are administered by the priests are the life of God that is given to people and nourishes their souls, nourishes you, my sisters and brothers. At this time we are living the sacrament of the Eucharist because, thanks to the ministry of the priests, Christ is present here among us. Let us live this life in an intense way and let us not lose this life through sin. Be very careful, because as I have said, a priest maintains his priestly power even though he has separated himself from the Church. We do not say that the sacraments that he administers are invalid but we do say that those who consciously receive these sacraments from this priest are in sin. They commit a sin that is called a sacrilege because they received a sacrament from one who is separated from this communion with the Church and they should not receive these sacraments from one who is excommunicated. One sins when one knowingly participates in the sacraments in this way. Naturally, if one is not aware of this situation, then the absolution of the priest is valid and the individual is forgiven. We give thanks because our God is merciful but will, however, ask that priest to give an accounting of himself: *Why are you administering illegitimately that which you should not be administering?* Yes, the priest must give an accounting to God, but God is good toward those who receive these sacraments unknowingly --- they have received the Truth. Here, however, in Quezaltepeque, we cannot speak of ignorance since this is a fact that is known throughout the Republic.

My sisters and brothers, we see that the Church that was entrusted to Saint Joseph is alive here. I want to conclude with this thought of the Council: *the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race* (m). It does not matter that everyone does not belong to this Church. Indeed, the Council says (n) that the Church can be a small community but in these small communities are all the power of redemption and all the unifying power of the Church. My sisters and brothers the number of people who are in the Church is not important nor is the number of her material buildings important. The Church has built many temples and seminaries and other buildings that later were taken away from her, robbed from her and have become libraries and police stations and even markets. The material walls that remain behind in history are not important. What is important is you, men and women, your hearts and the grace of God that gives you the Truth and the Life of God. Do not consider the number of people but rather give much consideration to the sincerity of heart which enables people to follow this Truth and this grace of our divine Redeemer.

My beloved sisters and brothers I urge you here in Quezaltepeque to maintain this firm communion of true Catholics with your true pastor. I want to take this time to greet the beloved Father Roberto who has been faithful in maintaining this sign of unity. Through him I also want to greet and thank the Sisters, especially the Sisters in the school here --- I thank them for the solidarity with which they have defended the cause of true Christianity. I also want to thank the Belgian Sisters who have suffered in these circumstances but who have remained firm in maintaining this unity of our Church. I thus urge all of you to be aware of your obligations as baptized persons to accept this hierarchical unity that is expressed here in Quezaltepeque by the true pastor, Father Roberto. Remain united to him and as he is united to the bishop and the bishop to the Pope and the Pope to Christ. In this way we become that electrical current that is bringing to Quezaltepeque this dynamic power of God's grace and the illuminating light of the truth of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Blessed be Saint Joseph who protects us. When the Lord entrusted to him the life of the Virgin and life of Christ, our Lord, he knew that throughout history Saint Joseph would play a very important role. He was entrusted with guarding the hierarchic unity and the truth that is communicated by the true hierarchy. He was entrusted with guarding the communion of life so that in the same way that Mary and the Child Jesus were cared for, so too the Church would be protected, loved, sheltered and strengthened beneath the patronage of this great worker and simple man. The greatness of a person is not measured by his/her social status but by the nobility of their heart. Saint Joseph was a man who trusted in God and was in turn entrusted with the nascent mysteries of redemption that have now become the Universal Church. As members of a Universal Church, as members of the communities here present in this celebration in Quezaltepeque, let us offer our Mass in honor of Saint Joseph for the glory of our Lord. So be it.

¹ Collect for the feast of St Joseph.

² Reference to the conflict provoked by Fr Antonio Pineda Quinteros who refused to hand over his parish to the new parish priest appointed by Archbishop Romero.

Margin References (a) lg 63: (b) Lk 1,38: (c) Rm 1,3-4: (d) Lk 1,34: (e) Lk 1,35-37: (f) Lk 2,48: (g) Mt 3,17: (h) LG 8: (i) Mt 23,13: (j) mt 26,14-16: (k) Lk 9,24: (l) Lk 9,26: (m) LG 1: (n) LG 9.