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CHRIST THE KING IS THE STAR THAT GUIDES OUR HISTORY

**Thirty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Christ the King
25 November 1979**

Daniel 7:13-14

Revelation 1:5-8

John 18:33-37

With the joy of feeling in communion with the pope, let me read you the letter we received, thanking us for the best wishes we sent him on his anniversary: «Reverend Archbishop: I happily undertake the task of conveying to you the profound gratitude of His Holiness for the thoughtful message of congratulations you sent in the name of the priests and faithful of San Salvador on the occasion of the first anniversary of his pontificate. I am pleased to communicate to you that the Holy Father, with loving sentiments in the Lord, prays that new heavenly blessings be poured out upon you and your people as a sign of renewed energy for building up the ecclesial community, and he grants you his heartfelt apostolic blessing. Sincerely yours in Christ, the Secretary of State». (Applause)

With this fresh bond uniting us with the pope, dear sisters and brothers, we experience great joy as we come to the close of another year of faithfully following the sacred liturgy. Today being the last Sunday of the liturgical year, let us now take a look back, like people who after a long hike have reached a high peak. Let us view the marvelous interweaving the Lord offers us between the time that is passing and the kingdom of God that remains. Let us recall that saying from ancient times: *Stat crux dum volvitur orbis*—«The cross stands firm while the world is turning». Such is the liturgical year: week by week we have been battered by the impetuous waves of our social situation, but at the same time we have viewed with serenity the kingdom of God, the mystery of Christ, and the cross which no one can dislodge.

This feast of Christ the King, crowning as it does the liturgical year, gives us an opportunity, amid our fears and hopes, to assay the situation of our country with optimism. For we know that our hearts and our faith are grounded in the love and the power of a King who remains for all time. That was the thought of Pius XI in 1925 when he closed out the Holy Year—an event celebrated every twenty-five years—by leaving us this feast of Christ the King as a memorial. People were still feeling the consequences of the First World War. Considering how wars derange the universe, divide nations, drag people toward sin, and promote division and materialism, the pope declared, «To help this divided and materialistic world find a path toward a solution, we point to Christ the King» (QP 20).

At the beginning of the present year, moreover, Pope John Paul II told us at Puebla, «The faithful of your countries expect and demand from you pastors an especially vigilant and zealous transmission of the truth about Christ. This truth is the core of evangelization and constitutes its essential content. The vigor of the faith of millions of people will depend on their deep knowledge of this truth. On such knowledge will also depend the

strength of their adhesion to the church and their active presence as Christians in the world. From this knowledge will flow options, values, attitudes, and actions capable of giving direction and definition to our Christian way of life and of creating new men and women, and eventually a new humanity, through individual and social conversion of conscience»¹.

Let us therefore celebrate this feast of Christ the King with true hope, and let us promise him, as a practical fruit, that we will study the mystery of Christ Sunday after Sunday starting now, for that is why we come here. Today is like the final class of this course on the mystery of Christ that the church has been teaching throughout the whole world. I feel tremendously pleased that this celebration of the word, which constitutes a true university for our diocese, has promoted faith in Jesus Christ. At the same time it has tried to incarnate that faith and God's kingdom in the concrete reality of our country. Those of you who have carefully followed the thoughts of the Sunday homilies can rest assured that you have received a catechesis grounded in the reality of the country. Those who haven't understood this can continue with your claims that we are just preaching politics.

May the Lord grant us all, then, an understanding of the effort the church is making to give life to the Gospel of Christ by shedding light on our reality and becoming incarnated in it. For that is the only way, says Pope John Paul, that we can achieve the proper Christian attitudes here in our country today.

In light of these hopes of our church, the readings you just heard suggest the theme for today's homily: «Christ the King is the Star That Guides Our History». There are three reasons for this: first, because his kingdom is the kingdom of God; second, because his mission is the truth; and third, because his object is the integral liberation of all humankind.

Christ's kingdom is the kingdom of God

My first thought, then, is that the kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of God. Let us consider especially the great truth Christ proclaimed before Pontius Pilate: *Rex sum ego*. «I am a king» (John 18:37). The Gospel gathers together all the promises and expectations of the Old Testament. The people had been hoping for a king who would be the Messiah, the promised descendent of David.

Saint John takes the account of the passion of Jesus Christ and makes it an account of his glorification. Despite the humiliations of the passion, John presents us with the serenity of a royal figure. This so-called Johannine irony is characteristic of John; he is known as the apostle or the evangelist of irony. It is with masterly irony that he describes the humiliation of Christ as being nothing less than the official proclamation by the greatest empire in history that Christ is the true king.

You have heard today's dialogue in which the representative of the powerful Roman empire asked the bound prisoner, «Are you the king of the Jews?» (John 18:33). Christ ended that dialogue with Pilate by saying, «Yes, I am a king. For this I was born: to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice» (John 18:37).

¹ 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).

John's narration continues with the crowning with thorns, the mockery of the scepter, the cloak, the throne, the cross. Yet in the midst of these blood-spattered ceremonies, a king was being enthroned. Through the ironic circumstance of a man condemned to death, God seized the empire of Rome as his instrument and proclaimed the truth of that inscription on the cross: «Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews» (John 19:19). And not only of the Jews, but of all peoples. As we gather together all the rich content of that trial, we remove his thorns and wipe away his blood, and it becomes wonderfully clear that Christ is a king very different from the kings of this world.

As I said, my first reflection is that the kingdom of Christ is the kingdom of God. Now I will explain a second aspect of what that means. Pilate was not afraid of that bogus king; rather, he made fun of him; he was not a political rival. Nevertheless, he sensed something mysterious and divine in that man. Even his wife sent word to him: «Have nothing to do with this righteous man. I couldn't sleep last night because of dreams about him» (Matt 27:19). And Pilate shuddered when he heard people talk about the Son of God (John 19:7-8). Given the polytheistic mentality of the Romans, Pilate could imagine that a god had fallen to earth from who knows where! So he asked him, «Where are you from?» (John 19:9). But Christ knows—and we who believe in him know—the true origin of this King.

In today's first reading we find the classical prophecy of promise preserved by the ancients: the Son of Man coming on the clouds with great power and majesty. This power and majesty derives from the throne that Daniel describes for us, the one on which the white-haired Ancient of Days is seated, representing a venerable Judge and the divine Father. From there among the clouds is born the kingdom that comes to earth; it is not of earthly origin.

The doxologies found in today's second reading from the Apocalypse sing of the glories of that kingdom that is not of this world: «To him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen» (Rev 1:6). They are like the echoes of angels that are heard descending to earth.

The voice of Christ then pronounces the very words of God, «I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Almighty» (Rev 1:8). As you know, alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is as if Christ were saying, «I encompass all the readings and all the Scriptures. I am the secret of all that exists, the beginning and the end. When nature first began, I already existed, and when history comes to an end, I will continue existing. The history so celebrated by humans is nothing but a speck in the sun of eternity that I am».

The Council enunciates here a very interesting relationship between the kingdom brought by Christ and the kingdom served by the church. What is the relation between the kingdom of God and the church? The church is not the whole of the kingdom of God; rather, the church is a servant of the kingdom of God; she proclaims the kingdom of God. The most beautiful thing of all, the Council says, is that the church «receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God and to be on earth the initial budding forth of that kingdom» (LG 5).

Consider the honor that is yours, dear Catholics! The church bears witness that the kingdom of God is already among us. The church herself is but a tiny seed. The whole of humankind is much larger than the church, but the church possesses the seed of God's

kingdom. The more Christian we all become, the better witnesses we will be to the great truth that the kingdom of heaven has descended to become the kingdom of human beings.

As a third point of my first reflection, I pose the question: what then is the relation between the kingdom of God and historical kingdoms? In the Jewish way of thinking there was a struggle unto death between the God who reigns supreme and the devil who wants to seize power from God. That is how the history of Israel is presented to us, as a struggle between God and the devil. At times the kingdoms of the earth become agents of that infernal kingdom that is opposed to God. During times of persecution the Jewish people had to draw on all their resources of faith and hope to keep their spirits up.

That's why this first reading, before singing the praises of the King of heaven who comes amid the clouds, tells us about the four empires that dominated Israel in the course of its history. Nebuchadnezzar and the kingdom of Babylon ruled over Palestine and drove the children of the kingdom of God into exile. Later that same Babylonian empire was conquered by the Medes, and the poor nation of Israel was passed to another owner. Later still, when the Persian empire won control, Cyrus providentially freed the Israelites so that they could return to Jerusalem and build a new temple. But even after they were in Jerusalem, there was still another invasion, that of the Greeks, subjecting them to the empire of Alexander of Macedonia.

This is what the prophet Daniel is describing with his famous vision of a statue with a head of gold, a body of bronze, arms of iron, and feet of clay (Dan 2:31-35). A stone from a mountain, which nobody threw, came and destroyed the statue of the four empires. Then the stone began to grow and became a mountain, representing the kingdom of God ruling over the dismembered empires.

The prophet Daniel also tells us about a day when a storm was stirring the sea, and from the sea arose four beasts: one in the form of a lion, another in the form of a bear, another in the form of a leopard, and finally a fourth beast which is not named but is said to have had «iron teeth and iron feet» and to have «thirsted for blood and devoured flesh» (Dan 7:7). With this mysterious apocalyptic language, Daniel was describing the persecution of those who believed in God. At that moment, however, there arose over those animals, now slain, the throne of the Almighty, and from that throne would come the king who enters this world. Once again, then, we behold God's triumph over the historical empires.

And what else do we find in today's Scripture reading from the Apocalypse, which describes for us the prince of the kings of the earth? «Every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will yoke themselves to his chariot» (Rev 1:7). The Apocalypse is from a different age; it was written by Saint John to encourage the Christians who were suffering persecution under Nero. The four old empires no longer existed. In the time of Christ it was Rome that ruled Palestine, and Christians were suffering persecution both in Rome and in the Holy Land. To encourage them and keep them from yielding, Saint John showed them that the eternal destiny of God's kingdom was the opposite of the fleeting destinies of the kingdoms of earth. Christ was to be seen even by those who pierced him (Apoc 1:7). Even the Romans who carried out his crucifixion would see him. The peoples who despised him would weep before him. Such is the outcome of history. The Lord is the one who controls history. He is the King of the ages.

The Gospel of Saint John was written in a context similar to that of the Apocalypse. It narrates the passion that Christ suffered as a result of the arrogance and pride of Pontius Pilate and the Romans. It ends, however, with the resurrection of the Lord, thus encouraging people to have faith in the King whom no one can overcome. The same ones who pierced him, who nailed him to the cross, who thrust a lance into his side, who spit on him, who crowned him with thorns—they will all look on him! How terrible will be their encounter with the king whom they have so maltreated!

This gospel captures the reflections of Christians as they pondered that dramatic encounter between Christ and Pilate. When Pilate asked him, «So you are a king?» Christ answered, «My kingdom is not of this world. If it were of this world, my army would have protected me from the Jews» (John 18:36-37). That's totally political language. He was a Jew, and yet he said, «If I were a king, I would have been defended against the Jews». A great commentator has said that such a statement could not be spoken by a Jewish Messiah. Christ was a king who was superior to his own country. When he said, «My kingdom is not of this world», he was not intending to distance himself from worldly kingdoms but rather to say, «My kingdom is not at the level of politics, like the kingdoms of this world. You have nothing to fear from my armies for I have none. You have nothing to fear from my diplomacy for I have none. I am not a political power. Have no fear».

Pilate, himself a diplomat and a politician, found no reason to condemn the Lord for either political or diplomatic reasons. He condemned him because of the political argument the Jews were putting forth: «If you do not condemn him, you are no friend of Caesar. We will inform against you and they will take your post away» (John 19:12). And in order to keep his political position Pilate committed a great injustice. But let it be quite clear that Christ our Lord proclaimed that his kingdom is not at the political level. His kingdom descends from heaven with special powers from God for subjecting all the empires of the world to the law of God and the truth of God. His kingdom has no limits or borders because it extends over all the world's peoples. It is not of this world, but it rules this world, and all rulers and legislatures must submit to it.

This makes it easy for us to understand what we must do as Christians, what our pastoral and ecclesial work should be. The reflections of many Christian groups often resemble political analysis. They have forgotten that our strength is not to be found there. Many Christians have great respect for a political party or organization, and in order to please the organization they're willing to slight the church. Often people end up forming political groups rather than Christian communities because they don't take into account the way Christ confronted Pilate and all the empires and political regimes of the world: he remained autonomous, the King who came down from heaven and became incarnate on this earth in order to transcend the kingdoms by his own inner strength, not to identify with them.

Hear me, beloved sisters and brothers—especially you dear ecclesial base communities—beloved pastoral ministers, beloved priests: we have no reason to beg before any political system on earth for we have a light that enlightens all political systems. Let us not take sides with any one sector. Let us maintain the autonomy that Christ maintained, even when shackled before Pilate: «You need not fear my kingdom because it is superior to yours». It's like that song we sing on the feast of the Three Kings. Herod was afraid that the newborn

child would take his kingdom away from him, but the church sings to him, «Have no fear, Herod. He who reigns eternally comes not to take away temporal kingdoms»².

It is quite true that we cannot draw apart from the political, social, and economic realities of earth, but let us always be the bright light that shines on the realities without being contaminated by them. Let us envelop the realities and give them warmth while always preserving the autonomy of sunlight. With that, let me pass on to my other two reflections.

Christ's mission is truth

How is it that Christ could say, «My kingdom is not of this world» (John 18:36), and yet he is proclaimed universal King today? My second reflection is that his mission is truth. Christ's dialogue with Pilate is very interesting since he changed the very horizon of Pilate's question, not by distorting it but by plumbing to its deepest depths. When Pilate asked, «Then you are a king?» Christ responded, «You say so, I am a king. For this was I born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice» (John 18:37).

Truth in the biblical sense can mean the opposite of falsehood, but it can also mean fidelity. In Christ we find the most eloquent testimony of God's fidelity. The Bible calls Christ «the Amen of God» (Rev 3:14). All the promises God made to humankind are fulfilled to perfection in Christ. Christ is the truth, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all that exists. No one knows the reality of things as profoundly as the King of truth does. That is why no one can say that Christ is untruthful. Saint John states, «There was no need to tell him what was within a person because he knew what was in each person's heart» (John 2:25).

Christ must have had tremendous insight into what people were thinking about him as they murmured! «Hypocrites, what are you thinking?» In the face of truth, all intrigue must hide its head in shame. John's gospel begins by relating the mystery of the incarnation of the Word. The eternal Word of God, the Word containing all creation and all God's infinity, became human. As Saint John says, «We saw in him the Son of God, full of grace and truth» (John 1:14). Christ is the magnificent personification of truth, the eternal Word made human. No friendship is greater than that of a sincere person, and who is more frank and sincere than Christ? He is the truth.

Truth is also revelation. Everything that God wanted to reveal to humankind is contained in Christ. When Christ was taking leave of his disciples, he told them, «I no longer call you servants but friends because I have revealed to you everything I have heard from my Father» (John 15:15). There are no longer any secrets for Christians who seek to love Jesus Christ, this witness of the truth who has brought us, straight from the heart of God, all we must know for life. Blessed are those who have faith because they believe in the truth. Unfortunate are those do not have faith, the skeptics who have drawn away from Christ, because he alone can give the light of truth.

Today's second reading from the Apocalypse calls Christ «the faithful witness» (Rev 1:5). The faithful witness is the one who can say to Nicodemus, «We speak of what we have seen» (John 3:11). We Christians say the same, for we are witnesses of the truth of God.

² From *Cruelis Herodes*, a hymn for vespers in the liturgy for the feast of the Epiphany.

What is our attitude, dear sisters and brothers, before this truth of Christ? I am powerfully impressed as I behold Christ alone there, standing before the world represented by Pilate. The Truth stands alone. His own followers are terrified. The Truth is completely fearless, and only heroes can follow the Truth. So much is this the case that Peter, who told him he would die if there were need, takes off in cowardly flight, leaving Christ alone.

Let us not fear being left all alone if it is for the sake of the truth. Rather let us fear being demagogues, craving the false adulation of the people. If we don't tell people the truth, we're committing the worst sin of all: betraying the truth and betraying the people. Preferring to stand alone before the world represented by Pilate, Christ declared, «Everyone who hears my voice belongs to the truth» (John 18:37).

Here we see Pilate's attitude revealed in a single question. After Christ told Pilate that everyone who belongs to the truth hears his voice, the procurator displayed the pride and contempt typical of a haughty Roman by asking him, «What is truth?» (John 18:38). He then turned around and proceeded to order that Christ be scourged and handed over to death. This man had the Truth so close at hand! He stood face to face with Truth, but his cynical pride rejected God and so did not allow him to grasp it.

In these days when there is an abundance of political opinions, we would do well to keep in mind that Christ alone has the truth and that truth cannot be subject to biases. I have here a text of the Council that speaks about the diversity of political opinions; it is quite relevant to our times. Christ is the only one who possesses the whole truth, and we humans have the truth of Christ, but we have it only by faith. When we apply it to the concrete realities of history, we can do so in different ways.

Listen now to the church's thought as expressed in the Council: «In virtue of her mission and nature, the church is bound to no particular form of human culture, nor to any political, economic, or social system. The church by her very universality can help form very close bonds between diverse human communities and nations, provided these trust her and truly acknowledge her right to true freedom in fulfilling her mission» (GS 42).

The Council then counsels people to listen to the voices of others and to be modest in the way they hold their political opinions: «Often enough the Christian view of things will itself suggest some specific solution in certain circumstances. Yet it happens rather frequently, and legitimately so, that with equal sincerity some of the faithful will disagree with others on a given matter. Even against the intentions of their proponents, solutions proposed on one side or another may be easily confused by many people with the Gospel message. Hence it is necessary for people to remember that in such situations they should not appropriate the church's authority for their own opinions. They should always try to enlighten one another through honest discussion, preserving mutual charity and caring above all for the common good» (GS 43).

This advice is quite opportune, sisters and brothers, in these days when there are so many fanatics saying, «I alone have the solution for the problems of this country!» or «The governing junta is quite wrong!» Or when some government official is saying, «Only we are right. The others are wrong». We have to search for the solutions among all of us. Those who are wedded to just one way of thinking are sinning against the common good. Christians do not have the right, with their diverse political options, to appropriate to themselves the thought of

the church as something belonging only to them. The sun of Christ's truth is so bright that it can shed light on all the diverse views found not only in politics but also arts and technology and natural sciences, all of which have their proper autonomy.

I think this is quite relevant for us and very important for our time, especially when people are trying to monopolize the truth. Only Christ has a monopoly on the truth. Only he can say, «I am the truth, and everyone who belongs to the truth hears my voice» (John 18:37). The rest of us have to respect the opinions and options of others. We have to trust in people because they are children of God and perhaps have greater abilities than we do.

Christ's objective is the integral liberation of all humankind

My final reflection is that the objective of Christ the King is the integral liberation of all humankind. The commentators have a very interesting opinion regarding the first reading, which speaks of the Son of Man coming amid the clouds and approaching the throne of God. They say that that glorified Son of Man is not just Christ as a lone individual; it is Christ with all Christians. It is the mystical body, which includes all those who have believed in him. Those who followed him faithfully until death will be glorified in the one head which is Christ. That mystical body of Christ, made up of those who followed him on this earth, will be the glorious consummation of the heavenly church. All of us, sisters and brothers, if we are saved, will have the good fortune of being living members of the Son of Man now glorified as the Son of God. Let us strive to be faithful so that we will merit this dignity which has no equal.

Accordingly, the second reading, from the Apocalypse, details for us the different fruits of the kingdom of God that Christ cultivated on earth. If we think of the first fruit we harvest from a tree we planted with great care and affection, we can understand why the Apocalypse calls Christ «the firstborn of the dead» (Rev 1:5a). Our church keeps producing the fruits of resurrection. The first fruit of Easter is Christ our Lord, the Firstborn, the first to be raised from the dead. This title provokes in me and all of us a desire to follow this Firstborn. As his sisters and brothers, we also are brought into being precisely for the glory of Easter and resurrection. The risen Christ has now placed in the world the principle of immortality. Blessed are those who believe in Christ risen from the dead because they have the seeds of eternal life sown in their souls.

The Apocalypse also says, «He loved us» (Rev 1:5b). This is the first cause: God loved us, and his love took concrete human form in Christ our Lord. Seeing Christ before the sick, before the blind, before the crippled, before the sinner is seeing mercy. It is God's love walking the paths of this earth. Who is not drawn by the tenderness of the Lord's love in Christ Jesus? He lives on earth, and he loves us. «And by that love», says the Apocalypse, «he has freed us from our sins at the cost of his blood» (Rev 1:5c). Christ knew that the Father was asking him for his own blood as the price of forgiveness. He did not shrink in horror from the dreadful sufferings of Good Friday but handed himself over. On his flesh were laid all our iniquities, says the prophet (Isa 53:4-5), and God charged to him the price of our liberation. There is no liberation as profound as Christ's. How trifling are the kinds of liberation that talk only about getting higher wages or more money and better prices! The types of liberation that talk only about political changes and government officials are mere bits and pieces of the great liberation, the one that canceled the root cause of all our ills and all our injustices. If earthly forms of liberation do not fit within the great liberation of Christ, the great Liberator, they are mutilated, not genuine—they are only scraps of liberation. (Applause)

The Apocalypse continues with another brilliant statement: «He has made us into his kingdom; he has made of us priests for God, his Father» (Rev 1:6). How great is the dignity of Christians! He has made us a kingdom. All of us are his kingdom if we follow him, if we grow in him, if we are converted. And since «his kingdom will have no end» (Luke 1:33), we ourselves will have no end in that kingdom. This is our great hope; this is our great achievement. What is more, Christ is not content with making us subjects of his kingdom; he has made us priests. That is, he has shared with us by baptism the dignity of being a priestly people. We are all priests who consecrate the world to God through the role that each of us has in that world, whether as lawyers, doctors, engineers, rulers, ministers, day laborers, workers, market women, students—whatever human group we belong to. Whenever we display the beauty of redemption that is ours by baptism and by being part of a priestly people, we are consecrating to God our jobs, our work, the people we serve.

This is the profound theology that can cleanse our country of all the filth that bad rulers and public servants have dumped upon it. How different El Salvador would be! We wouldn't be going through this crisis if we were truly sharing this great teaching of Christ the King. If we truly believed that he has made all of us Salvadorans the kingdom of God and a priestly people, then our lives and our homes would be dignified, spouses would not be betrayed, children would not be begotten outside the home, women and their productive labor would be respected, and people would not give their lives to prostitution and larceny and other kinds of sin. Rather, redemption would bring us dignity; it would sanctify this God-given life that is good but that we have sullied with our sins. Let us be worthy of this greatness.

The feast of Christ the King isn't about congratulating Christ because he is a king. Rather, it's about telling him, «Lord, your kingdom has captured me completely. I know that I am a member with great responsibility, and I have to help you reign in the world».

Life of the church

I therefore invite you to reflect a little on the reality of our church. What we've done this week corresponds closely to these plans of God, who wishes to make his church the seed of his kingdom.

Next Saturday the diocese of Santiago de María will be celebrating its twenty-fifth jubilee. The principal Mass will be a week from now, on Sunday the second, at ten o'clock in the morning. All those who can go and join in communion with that sister diocese will surely be performing a good act.

Wednesday of this week will be the anniversary of the death of Father Ernesto Barrera. We will celebrate it with a Mass in the parish of San Sebastián at six o'clock in the evening.

Some meetings have taken place in the archdiocesan offices for the express purpose of reinvigorating our church. In the pastoral council we've considered all the different forms of church life in the various vicariates, and in the priests' senate we have observed the fidelity of so many priests to their ministry and to service of the true kingdom of Christ.

I made a visit to the parish of Santo Tomás in the El Carmen district of Soyapango, and tonight I'll visit the parish of San Francisco in Mejicanos. Today there'll also be a confirmation at eleven o'clock in the church of Corazón de María. We see how these communities keep flourishing in their Christian convictions.

I heard some negative commentary regarding confirmations. Someone was saying that there are no confirmations in the archdiocese and that people are going to other dioceses to get confirmed. This is a perverse misunderstanding. What we are trying to do is make sure that confirmation is received by children who are sufficiently aware of what it means. If there are people who don't want to abide by that pastoral requirement, which is not mine but part of the church's renewal, then they are not helping the situation. It doesn't help children to be confirmed when they're very young because they don't understand what they have received. Every pastor and every vicariate is preparing for the celebration of confirmation; you can obtain the information in your own parishes. No one should say that there are no confirmations in San Salvador. There *are* confirmations, and they are administered in a very ordered and fruitful way. Only those who refuse to collaborate will close themselves off from these renewals of the church. A booklet of the archdiocese called *Búsqueda* [Search] has been re-edited so as to include all the catechesis for confirmation. Anyone who wants a more profound understanding of that sacrament can find it in the booklet *Búsqueda*.

In the vicariate of Chalatenango they are making a very original effort in the preparation of men who have late vocations. Preparatory classes are being given to mature young men who feel the call of priesthood but have never had the opportunity to attend school. We'll see how the Lord inspires us to prepare these men for the priesthood.

In this regard also, I was happy with the youth gathering that was held at San José de la Montaña Seminary. About twenty-five youths who have already graduated from high school have asked to enter the seminary. They come from different schools, not only from the seminary itself. By the way, I received a very encouraging telegram from Tepecoyo, which says, «Giving a priest for the service of the church is more valuable than giving thousands of sacred vessels for the sanctuary. We pray for the success of the vocational gathering, and we unite with you in offering sacrifices and prayers today and always. The Young Christ Band and the Miraculous Medal Chorus».

I also had the good fortune of taking part in a meeting of the catechumenate movement in the Instituto Rinaldi. Groups from this archdiocese and from Santiago de María came together there. I expressed my hopes for these men and women who are dedicated to catechesis in our pastoral ministry.

I want to correct something I said. The Divina Providencia project bought seven acres of land in Santa Tecla at a cost of 525,000 *colones*. The sale of steel rods produced 300,000 *colones*, which means that 225,000 *colones* is still owed and is now being collected. I also want to inform you that the boundaries of the land on which the Divina Providencia Hospital sits are in dispute, but we hope that the situation can be resolved reasonably. We will keep you informed.

I want to thank and congratulate UCA Editores since they have now published the Puebla document. We hope the price is affordable because the aim was to allow all of you to

have in your homes this beautiful document on pastoral work in Latin America. It was produced by the bishops' meeting in Puebla.

Tomorrow the sisters who work in our parishes and rural districts will begin their spiritual exercises. I ask your prayers so that they'll become ever better instruments of God's mercy in the many towns without priests and in the places where they collaborate with the pastors.

I also want to inform you that next Sunday we will transfer the Mass back to the cathedral in order to begin the liturgical year there on the First Sunday of Advent. We want to thank the people of the basilica for their hospitality. We hope we can still make use of it in case they occupy the cathedral again and we have to return here. Let us hope that the people's organizations realize how much they discredit themselves by occupying the churches. When I was in San Miguel on the twenty-first, I didn't hear a single word of approval; the people were very resentful about the occupation of their cathedral. Here the resentment is not so strong, but we're not happy about having our churches occupied. In the cathedral we have to make a new effort to bring worship back to life because they've killed it. The construction work has also been badly hampered. They're not aware of the tremendous harm they cause by these actions and strategies. They may have good objectives, ones that we fully support, but they shouldn't use tactics which offend the sentiments of our people.

The archdiocese's intervention has also been requested in the case of the kidnapping of Don Jaime Batlle. For our part, we are quite willing, but we know that any intervention must also be accepted by the other side. In this regard I repeat what Mr. Batlle's family wrote to the FPL. Since the FPL have publicly acknowledged that they kidnapped Jaime, the family wrote as follows:

We feel freed from the obligation of absolute reserve and secrecy that you required of us. Our family by this medium appeals to your conscience to release Jaime since the amount of money demanded in exchange for his freedom is completely beyond our economic capacity. The amount that can be offered by the family is limited by the present situation of credit, one that has been created mainly by the violence that prevails in the country. Contrary to what is expressed in the letter which you claim was written by Jaime, *you* are the ones who have kidnapped him and caused anguish, pain, and tears for his wife, his children, his mother, and his brothers and sisters. His grieving family is willing to do anything to rescue their beloved Jaime, but it is your intransigence in the negotiations that is causing pain for others. You can find further information in the letter we have already sent you³.

If my intervention can help in any way, then once again I gladly offer it.

We are also greatly disturbed by something that happened in the community of Aguilares. Yesterday, November 24, Daniel Navarro Cruz was arrested by the National Guard, and people fear for his fate. They arrested him at eleven o'clock when he was picking up a pair of shoes and a watch. People saw several members of the National Guard arrest him, and they took him away to an unknown destination. We thought that such things would not be

³ *La Prensa Gráfica* (23 November 1979).

happening now. We want to advise the new government that such actions do not earn the people's goodwill. Let us hope that they crack down. (Applause)

Everyone is aware that the FAPU has asked me a series of questions. I inform them that I am happy to answer them, but I will do so at our social communications office. There we will provide exhaustive data. There is no need for demagogic regarding a matter that can be resolved in a serious private interview.

Uniting ourselves to the universal church, we ask you all to pray for the success of the pope's visit to Istanbul. In his desire for unity he will meet with Dimitrios, the Orthodox patriarch, at the end of this month. Pray also for the success of his interview with the president of the British Methodist Conference. To the pope's efforts we unite our own ecumenical efforts, which give much reason for hope. Let us hope that one day Christ's dream of «one flock and one shepherd» becomes a reality (John 10:16).

The Bishops Conference of Nicaragua, as you're aware, published a pastoral letter on Christian commitment. I want to refer to a few sections of it because I believe they throw much light also on our own situation in El Salvador. The Nicaraguan church says, «We have confidence that the revolutionary process will be original, creative, profoundly Nicaraguan, and in no way imitative»⁴. I would like to speak the same words to all those who are striving for the transformation of our country. In your debates with one another, ask yourselves plainly whether you want a solution that comes from the hearts of our own people or whether you're struggling to import something from outside. (Applause) Like the bishops of Nicaragua, I tell you that I will wholeheartedly support every social, economic, and political transformation that arises from the hearts of our own Salvadoran people by the light of the Gospel. That's the transformation that will bring about the true liberation of our country, not the kind imposed by some type of imperialism. (Applause)

«What we desire», say the Nicaraguan bishops, «is a process that moves steadily toward a society that is fully and authentically Nicaraguan, neither capitalist nor dependent nor totalitarian»⁵. Again: «The church reminds us that no historical revolution is capable of exhausting the infinite possibilities of the supreme justice and solidarity brought about by the kingdom of God»⁶. This is precisely what we have preached today. The kingdom of Christ does not identify with Pilate or with any other kingdom; it maintains a capacity that always surpasses any historical realization.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, do not doubt your church. She cannot commit herself to any political regimen. She must always remain free so that she can point out better routes, trusting that the kingdom of God will always help to improve the existing systems. As perfect as the systems may appear at a given moment, they can always be improved, and that is the church's mission. She must point out, as Christ did before Pilate, that her kingdom is not of this world, for it transcends all kingdoms and brings them to a perfection beyond any that now exists.

⁴ *Christian Commitment for a New Nicaragua: Pastoral Letter of the Bishops Conference of Nicaragua*, 17 November 1979, ECA 374 (1979) 1105.

⁵ Ibid., 1105.

⁶ Ibid., 1104.

In Honduras they expelled a Jesuit priest, Father Guadalupe Carney. The bishops conference and the Society of Jesus in Honduras have protested to the government because of this expulsion, which they judge to be arbitrary and unjust.

Events of the week

I am now going to refer to an analysis made by the UCA, the Universidad Centroamericana, and use it as a framework for my comments⁷. In this analysis the UCA expresses both its hopes and its serious doubts about the real possibilities for effective action by the new government. It admits that it's impossible, just one month after the insurrection, to give a definitive judgment on the opportunities and dangers that the new process could produce. The initial intentions of the young military officials were possibly aimed at purging the military institution and providing the country with a solid foundation for the democratic process, but the subsequent forging of social relations and the correlation of forces have begun to overshadow their presumed initial intentions. The UCA analysis mentions some problems that are worth keeping in mind as we analyze our own reality as a diocese. The main problems are the following.

First, the problem of the disappeared persons. Regarding this problem the UCA says, «There is a fear of carrying out trials since such publicized measures could greatly compromise the strength needed by the armed forces, especially when they are seeking to bring about profound social changes. There is also some reason to think that one of the basic aims of the repressive actions of these first three weeks is to implicate the new regime in violence that precludes judgment and punishment for past violence»⁸.

In this regard, we find it strange that a member of the junta, according to press reports, has declared that there are no political prisoners and that the junta is in no way responsible for what happened in the administrations of previous presidents⁹. I say I find this strange because the junta member surely hasn't forgotten that already during this new regime at least three persons have been disappeared. One of them is the sacristan of Soyapango, about whom I have still received no response even though I've been shouting about the case here week after week. Moreover, even if the new government is not directly responsible for the arrest and disappearance of political prisoners by earlier regimes, I believe that they are responsible before the people for giving a satisfactory response concerning what happened to those prisoners, and they also have a duty to punish the persons responsible for the tortures, illegal arrests, and other crimes. (Applause)

Perhaps I'm too pragmatic in these matters, but for me the most logical and effective thing would be for an investigatory commission to begin by judging and determining the criminal responsibility of those who were in charge of the security forces during that time. (Applause) I think an effort is being made to examine what is known already and to discover where more information can be found. At the same time, it is not true that there are no political prisoners in the jails. There are some, even if they're accused of common crimes related to politics. It seems that what we have here is a technical impediment that the legal experts must settle quickly so that this problem which so seriously affects the country can be resolved. For

⁷ «Statement of the Superior Council of the Universidad José Simeón Cañas on the New Situation of the Country after November 15», *ECA* 372/373 (1979) 849-862.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 853.

⁹ «Declarations of Doctor Guillermo Manuel Ungo in Costa Rica» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 November 1979).

their part, Legal Aid and the Human Rights Commission have presented a long list of all the political prisoners.

Also this week Legal Aid presented dossiers and other important documents for 205 cases of disappeared persons¹⁰. The archdiocese, in solidarity with their families, asks, «Where are they?» We expect a satisfactory answer and also compensation for the families of the disappeared persons who presumably have been killed. (Applause)

I have some very important news in this regard. You've all heard about a decomposed, eviscerated body that was found on the Los Chorros highway and also about several skeletons found on a mountain near the Cuscatlán bridge. But I have further news.

While two lawyers, in accord with the law, were applying for habeas corpus for a *campesino* arrested on October 5, they discovered a cellar at the Treasury Police compound on Tuesday the twentieth. The central part of their report says the following:

Having carried out a personal inspection of all the facilities of the security forces, we must register here the anomalous situation we found at the Treasury Police compound. During the inspection, when we arrived at what was identified as the fourth garrison, located toward the left side of the back part of the compound, we sensed that the garrison floor sounded hollow, as if it had an empty space below. Since part of the floor was covered with tiles and other things, we asked that they be removed. What appeared underneath was a rectangular grille, which when lifted revealed a circular room that was completely sealed off. It was located beneath the floor of the garrison, and it could be reached by a wooden ladder that was in place. The undersigned proceeded to descend in order to inspect that place personally. There, with the help of flashlights, he saw the following notations on the walls: the name «Centeno» and a cross beneath it; the words «died here», followed by something illegible; the name «Robert»; «Mario Henríquez was here»; «I am leaving but my hatred remains»; «One thing is certain, evil never ends»; another cross and then some vertical lines as if indicating days that had passed or other periods of time. The place had a very humid odor like a crypt, convincing the judge and the secretary that this was a clandestine cell in which prisoners had been detained in extremely inhumane conditions. We should point out that the officials denied any knowledge of the existence of this place, and they treated us with great courtesy and deference. We believe that with this report we are complying with article 24 of our still valid political constitution, which establishes the duty of citizens to be attentive to the observance of the constitution».

In their report these lawyers also state that the prisoner registers of the security forces are not at all reliable, and they give the following reason: «We proceeded to inspect the books of the National Guard to see whether they had registered the prisoners captured at the religious center El Despertar in San Antonio Abad on January 20 of this year. There was no mention of the names of the forty young people, even though it was public knowledge that the National Guard had placed them at the disposition of the criminal courts». This is a valuable report which the investigatory commission now has at its disposal. (Applause)

¹⁰ *La Prensa Gráfica* (23 November 1979).

Along with this campaign on behalf of the disappeared persons, there is another campaign for the families of those who were killed for belonging to ORDEN, the PCN, or other security forces. We think that it is certainly just that there be an investigation of the causes of the deaths of these persons; the same norms should be applied here as in other areas of our life together. In any case, the carrying out of justice should not be conditioned on the purging of the security forces. Justice must be done, but it is also just that the security forces be purged as soon as possible.

Since it is a matter of justice and finding the causes for our ills, the new government must not stop until it finds the ultimate cause, which is social injustice. We have always believed that all the violence perpetrated by the security forces, as well as the violence suffered by them, derives from a deeper criminal source, namely social injustice. (Applause)

Let us continue a little further now with the UCA analysis, which gives a precise description of the great challenge facing the new government. The challenge is stated this way: «A problem cannot be solved by revolutionary cries or destructive conduct whose prolonged nature would make the salvation of the country totally unviable»¹¹. I appeal again for sanity amid all the violence that still persists. We are not going to transform our country by being destructive but by seeking the root of the evil and working together among all of us to eradicate it.

Neither can this transformation of our country be brought about without very radical structural changes. The UCA analysis continues, «Some have called this complex of radical changes the “necessary revolution”. The revolution is necessary because it is dictated and characterized not by ideologies but by the concrete reality. The specter of ideologies should not prevent us from recognizing the need for revolution in the political and economic arenas. This country, which is now conceived and organized for the benefit of a minority, must be reconceived and reorganized, not in terms of an abstract common good that often conceals the vices of domination and exploitation, but in terms of the full development and liberation of the oppressed majority of the people. Such a perspective implies radical change for many of our institutions, which have been designed and, above all, utilized for just the opposite»¹². This, then, is the great task and the great challenge of the new government and of anyone who is striving for the true liberation of the country: it is the reordering of structures in the social, political, and economic spheres. Let us all pray to God, dear sisters and brothers, that the changes consist not just in applying patches. Let them truly be the «new wine in new wineskins» that Christ called for in demanding evangelical renewal. (Mark 2:22).

We wish to greet the reappearance of the *Independiente* newspaper, now in its fifth stage of publication. May it be another light of freedom among our people.

The problems of ANDES, the buses, and the people living in the slums are on the way to satisfactory solution. Demonstrations have been held without incident. Various political sectors have freely expressed themselves in public statements and press conferences, giving evidence of a climate that didn't exist previously. Taking this into consideration, I make an appeal to all the professional and political forces of the country to combine their voices and

¹¹ «Statement of the Superior Council of the Universidad José Simeón Cañas on the New Situation of the Country after November 15», ECA 372/373 (1979) 856.

¹² Ibid. 856-857.

their opinions into a pluralistic understanding of our common good, which is the renewal of the country. This is no time for passivity. All Salvadorans, even the humble folk, must now contribute what they can to the reconstruction of our people.

There have been complaints of violence on the coffee, cotton, and sugar cane plantations. It's even reported that coffee trees are being cut down and cotton plants destroyed. I want to remind you of the wise words the pope spoke to the *campesinos* in the United States. He told them that one of the most important duties of rural workers is to preserve for future generations the land that God made for the benefit of all of us. «You have been entrusted with some of the best land in the world», the pope told them, «very rich soil. You are stewards of some of the most important resources that God has bestowed on the world. Conserve the land well so that your children's children and the generations that follow them will inherit an even richer land than the one entrusted to you»¹³. I am convinced, dear sisters and brothers, that the just wages you demand must be obtained some other way, not by destroying the common wellspring of the country's wellbeing.

The impasse at the university has been resolved, thank God. I want to congratulate the new authorities and urge them to make the university a center of studies which truly brings enlightenment and hope to our country. Don't let it be a cauldron of confusion where there is more politics than study and science.

I conclude by reading two letters, just a short thought from each one, because they catch the mood of this moment. One of them is from a good friend of mine who is an official; he writes, «A few hours ago (it's now eight in the evening) I explained to my companion that I've detected some serious obstacles; they are quagmires that will bog down justice if they're not overcome. The Supreme Court will end up digging a common grave for the prisoners illegally murdered and for those who have been cruelly and savagely disappeared. Archbishop, I feel terribly alone and frustrated. I have invoked God's strength, the love of my wife and my children, and my love of neighbor so that I may be relieved of this sensation of bitter sadness and depression». Please don't fall into this pessimistic state, dear officials. You cannot rest at this time when there is so much work to do. We have to change and not be slaves to legalities now that the country has seen the very laws of the constitution being trampled on. We must not be slaves of formulas but must seek an honest and just solution for our poor country.

The other letter is from a transport worker who writes, «Recently I've been especially intrigued by your insistence on the restructuring of the security forces». He says that he works in a bus operation. «It's not a flourishing business. It's only by hard, methodical work that we achieve the miracle of subsistence. Until now the National Police have offered us little security. The police consist almost totally of people who make a profession of seeking bribes. It has become second nature, but it seriously affects the precarious economies of our homes, which are already in tatters. You are well aware of the high costs of all that is needed for this work».

Joined with this reflection is an anguished voice from the slums, which says the following: «Living miserably, we sink every day deeper into desperation. We have no clean

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily at the Mass Celebrated for "Living History Farms" in Des Moines», 4 October 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (21 October 1979).

water, no sewers, no lavatories. We have no doctors or medicines or anything. We live on the crags, in the ravines, alongside dumps and pestilent streams. We are victims of maltreatment and social injustice».

All these statements proclaim the reality of our people. This is the setting in which we are celebrating the feast of Christ the King, the King of justice, the King of law, the King of human dignity. The people in government are presented with a great challenge, not only by the misery of the people but above all by the justice of God who has made us all equal in his image and likeness, persons who share in the dignity of Christ the Redeemer. We are destined to enjoy the same happiness with Christ, but we will do so only by making of this earth an antechamber of that kingdom beyond. The feast of Christ the King fills us with hope because he is alive. Therefore, supported by faith and hope in him and relying on our prayer, our work, and our solidarity, let us continue to seek a better world! (Applause)