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Christ Manifests His Glory in the Happiness of Human Beings

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

20 January 1980

Isaiah 62:1-5

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

John 2:1-12

The Epiphany still shines forth, dear sisters and brothers, in the word of God this Sunday. We hear echoes of the mystery of Christmas, which consists in God's coming into our history and revealing himself. God wants to be known by all human beings.

Three gospel events revealing the glory of Christ are celebrated in the Catholic liturgy during these Sundays. The first one we celebrated on January 6: the Magi from the East who were led by a star to worship Jesus. The second we celebrated last Sunday: the baptism of Christ, when the heavens opened and the words were heard: «This is my Son, my beloved, my delight» (Matt 3:17). The third event is the one we celebrate this Sunday. It is the moment when Saint John presents Christ performing his first sign to manifest his glory and strengthen the disciples' faith in him. So our objective for this Sunday is to believe more in Jesus Christ and to know him better so that he becomes truly a new epiphany for our faith.

This epiphany, like every epiphany, is an invitation to rejoice. The tone of our readings today is one of joyfulness. Urging people to rejoice may seem cynical at a time like this in El Salvador, when there is so much affliction, so much fear, so much psychosis. Nevertheless, I believe that there is no more appropriate summons for our country and for Salvadorans than the liturgical summons to joy and optimism that we hear this morning.

Today we find ourselves in the middle of Jerusalem, along with the people returning from their exile after those horribly depressing years when God seemed to remain silent. Returning to Jerusalem, they found their homeland destroyed and in ruins. Everything seemed dead. Nevertheless, despite the silence, despite those ruins, despite the depression, despite the psychosis, the prophet lifted up his voice: «For love of Zion I will not keep quiet. For love of Jerusalem I will not rest until the dawn of her righteousness and her deliverance shine forth like a torch. The nations will see your righteousness and the kings your glory» (Isa 62:1-2a). This is the optimism of faith. God has been with us even in the midst of tribulations, and now that they have passed, the joyful dawn of liberation is breaking forth. Let us no longer be sad.

This is the assurance that the church wants to implant in us today: God is at our side. Christmas is a reality. God has entered history; he wants to be known and to awaken the faith of his disciples. We believe that the problems of our country are unsolvable, just as Mary thought when she said, «They have no wine» (John 2:3). She feared the people would feel shame if the wedding feast kept going and there was not the kind of joy that every party needs. But like Mary who faced a problem that seemed humanly insoluble, we look to Christ, and we

feel that Christ is there, as it says at the beginning of today's gospel: «Christ was there, and Mary his mother was also with him» (John 2:1-2).

I would therefore, sisters and brothers, like to title my reflection today on the new epiphany: «Christ Manifests His Glory in the Happiness of Human Beings». To the extent that people are happy, Christ's glory is being made manifest. In the measure that a people is following the paths of peace and justice, of solidarity and love, Christ is being glorified. Christ is in history, and history reflects Christ through people's confidence and joy. So that's why we are calling our reflection, «Christ Manifests His Glory in the Happiness of Human Beings». Our first reflection about this theme will be on salvation symbolized as a wedding feast. The second reflection will concern the Virgin: Mary as the figure of a church rich in charisms and powerful in interceding with God. And the third reflection will concern us personally: by faith we share in the joy of God's kingdom.

Salvation symbolized as a wedding feast

Saint John wrote what we call the «Gospel of Signs». For Saint John the miracles recounted in his gospel were not simply stories about Christ's wondrous powers or even about his compassion for those who were suffering. For Saint John there was something more profound in each miracle, and that's why his gospel is called the «Gospel of Signs». In fact, he ends the story of the miracle at the wedding in Cana by saying, «This was the first sign» (John 2:11). When speaking of «signs» in the gospel accounts, Saint John was referring to manifestations of the person and mission of Christ in the world. Seven signs or seven miracles are highlighted in the Gospel of Saint John, and what interests the evangelist in recounting each one is how it reveals a new aspect of the mystery of who Christ was.

We're not going to talk about all seven signs today, just this first sign, which is related to his «hour»: «Woman, my hour has not yet come» (John 2:4). The «hour» of Christ expressed something very close to his heart. His hour would come when, nailed to the cross, he redeemed the world and when, risen, he was glorified by God. The pain was not separated from the glory: cross and paschal mystery are the sign, they are the hour. That hour had not yet arrived, chronologically speaking, when Mary made her request. But in essence what he told her was this: «What I am going to do now is something that foreshadows my hour. I am going to give a glimpse of the glorification that will be consummated on the day when I die on the cross and am raised up. Even now my miracles will explain the meaning of that death and that resurrection. After my glorification, mother, you who have collaborated in this redemption will have a very active, fruitful part to play. We will anticipate that hour now, but only then will you completely assume your role of motherly intercession in the history of humankind».

So for Christ that miracle was a sign rich in redeeming, messianic content. What is the meaning of this sign for us? First of all, it reveals that Christ has creative power and can mold the elements of creation. With the same ease with which he said, «Let there be water», he could say now, «Let the water become wine». As Creator he can transform nature, thus revealing the Creator's glory in human flesh.

But he is also revealing something else: a presence that is able to resolve all problems. Mary's anguish is an expression of all human anguish: «They have no wine» (John 2:3). We could change that phrase to cover so many other human needs, such as «We have no peace» or «We cannot find the right road for our country» or «We find anguish, violence, and disorder

everywhere». But Mary's anguish was full of hope because she sensed that there was something powerful in her son, that he could solve what was humanly insoluble. All she had to do was tell him, «They have no wine». All she had to do was explain to him the need, knowing with the confidence that comes of faith that the miracle would come.

If only we Salvadorans knew how to speak to Jesus with the same confidence that Mary had and tell him about our present anguish! We would not speak out of pessimism or desperation but with the confidence of absolute impotence that trusts in absolute omnipotence: «You can do all things. I only have to explain what is needed, and you will see what must be done!» Despite what seemed like Jesus' negative response, Mary was so confident that she told the servants, «Pay attention to him. Do whatever he tells you» (John 2:5). And the glory of God was revealed when the head steward tasted the savory wine and said to the bridegroom, «Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people at the feast are feeling high, an inferior one. But you have done the reverse: you have left the best wine till last» (John 2:10). This delicious wine, made directly by the hands of Christ, was evidence of a power that resolves irresolvable problems better than we could ever hope.

What else does a sign do? It reveals a transformation. It is not just that water is turned into wine. For Saint John there is always something deeper in the sign that needs to be searched out. We mustn't read the Gospel of Saint John superficially. We have to analyze it, and the more theological knowledge we gain, the more depth we find in this gospel, which is pure theology. The water in those jars was kept by the Jews for purification, and for John what Jesus did was no doubt a sign that all the Jewish rituals and the old laws were now giving way to the wine which would be the sign of Christian worship. Bread and wine are the signs of our Mass, the signs of a religion that reaches perfection with God's actual presence among us. All this and much more we can find in the sign of the water that is made into wine.

But there is another precious meaning in this sign that we shouldn't lose from sight, and it has to do with the setting in which John has chosen to tell this story of Christ's first sign. It took place at a wedding, revealing that people's happiness is God's glory. Just as the young couple are joyfully wedded, as the first reading tells us (Isa 62:5), so also does God want all people to enjoy earthly happiness, the joy of living and loving and sharing and celebrating. Our God is not a sad God. He is a God of joyful fiestas and festivals. In the hearts of those who have faith there is no room for pessimism.

In order to better understand this sign of matrimony, we have to go back to the Old Testament. That's why we have the reading of a passage from Isaiah, to help us understand today's gospel better. It is one of the passages where God describes his relations with humanity using the images of a wedding. How wonderful it is to know that God loves us the way spouses love one another! Speaking to Jerusalem, which is a symbol of the humanity that God wants to redeem with love, he declares, «You shall be a majestic crown in the hand of the Lord» (Isa 62:3a). It was sometimes customary for kings to wear crowns that resembled the walls of their city, and in this passage God's crown has the form of the walls of Jerusalem, «a royal diadem in the palm of your God» (Isa 62:3b). Do you see that the meaning of glory for God is the happiness of human beings? It's as if we are his crown—how crazy can God get! We are the height of his happiness! He has created us so that he can delight in our happiness! «No more shall you be called "forsaken", nor shall your land be called "Desolate". You shall be called "My Delight"»—the pet name of a man for his wife—«and your land shall be called "Espoused" for the Lord has favored you, and your land is now betrothed. As a young man marries his bride, so

your Builder will marry you. As a husband rejoices over his bride, so does God rejoice over you» (Isa 62:4-5). We see, then, that the happiness of God coincides with the happiness of human beings.

In passing, I would like to draw a conclusion from all this: our religion is a feast. Our coming together for Sunday Mass should be characterized by the joy of finding ourselves in the company of this God who loves us. We should be singing and participating joyfully. The way we leave the church after Mass is for me an inspiration. I delight in the joy, the love, and affection that we express as we greet one another before leaving for our homes¹.

I would also like to draw another conclusion, namely, that each married couple should be a sign of God's joy among us. There should be no bitterness between husband and wife and children. The family should manifest such harmony and joy and love that when we look at them, we think, «How wonderful God is that he can bond people together this way!» For example, when we see a family going for a walk together, it is a reflection of God's joy on earth. It is the great mystery of matrimony; as Saint Paul says, «It is a great mystery—I am speaking of Christ and the church» (Eph 5:32). Every man and woman who marry and have children are church; they are Christ, they are church, they are community, they are the family of God reflected in a human family. So salvation is presented under the sign of a wedding feast.

Mary as the figure of a church rich in charisms and powerful in interceding with God

With filial affection toward Mary, let us consider her in our second reflection, which I call «Mary as the figure of a church rich in charisms and powerful in interceding with God». In keeping with the symbolism of the Gospel of John, Mary is not simply the mother of Jesus. In the rich symbolism of this passage, Mary appears as an image of the church. Saint John wants to use the relation between Mary and Jesus to explain to us the relation between Jesus and the church.

This was one of the most beautiful achievements of our Second Vatican Council: they crowned their reflections on the church by writing a chapter about Mary as mother of the church² and by making all the church's pastoral, missionary, and catechetical work consist in having people become more like Mary. The council made Mary the goal and the inspiration of all the church's work because she is the model of the church we are trying to build.

Wherever Jesus is, there is Mary. The first thing about Mary's presence is that we will never find Mary separated from Jesus or Jesus separated from Mary. Wanting a Christianity without Mary is like separating a precious stone from its ring or a pearl from the gold in which it is mounted. Wanting a Christ without Mary is like wanting a child without the arms of his mother. A Christmas without Mary is meaningless, and so is the dead man abandoned at the foot of the cross, without the affectionate maternal arms that take him down from the cross. Mary is neither divine nor a goddess nor a redeemer, but she is indispensable. She works in such intimate collaboration with God that we cannot do without her. That is what is expressed

¹ At the end of Mass Romero had the custom of leaving by the main entrance of the cathedral so that he could greet the faithful and take leave of them.

² The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, dedicates its final chapter to the Virgin Mary: «The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in The Mystery of Christ and the Church».

so beautifully in today's gospel: «The mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and his disciples were there also» (John 2:1-2). They are a unity: Jesus, Mary, and all Christians.

Another aspect of Mary's presence is her confident intercession. Our prayer gains tremendously when we place it in Mary's hands. For we ourselves are Mary; we are church when we pray for one another and when, worried about the wedding, we tell Jesus, «They have no wine». We are church when we are more concerned about asking favors for others than about asking them for ourselves. This sense of community is a great school of generosity!

The response of Jesus is also a mystery. He called Mary «woman» but not out of any disrespect (John 2:4a). It was, of course, the customary way in which people in the East addressed women. But the word also means something more profound: it means «Eve», it means «mother of the living», it means «this marvelous being that God has made so that human life will come out of her bosom». For Christ, Mary was more than his physical mother. She was the mother created by God to give spiritual birth to the whole of a redeemed humanity. She was like Eve in paradise, to whom Adam gave the name «woman» since she would be his companion in fruitfully populating the earth.

Jesus' mysterious response, «What is it to you and to me?» (John 2:4a) is not disrespectful but is a profound revelation of how the relationship between Christ and Mary is subordinated to a higher will. This response is similar to the one the child Jesus made to Mary when he got lost: «Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?» (Luke 2:49). At the wedding Jesus was simply saying to his mother, «What else need you and I do but obey the Father? The hour that he decides will be the hour for miracles, not the hour when you ask me for one». So also, the church's relation with Jesus, who is obedient to the time set by the Father, is one of collaboration in obedience to God. What is important is that Mary does not intervene in order to upset the plans of God; rather, she is the «handmaid of the Lord» (Luke 1:38). If she collaborates with Christ, it will not be as a mother with her son, but always as a creature with her Creator, always obeying the will of the Father.

When Christ said, «My hour has not yet come» (John 2:4b), he was telling Mary, «Your hour also is still to come. When I am glorified, your mission will also be glorified. If we now anticipate that hour with a miracle, it is because we are going to give a sign that will last through all the church's history. You will always be my most intimate collaborator in that hour when I redeem the world. You will receive from my hands all the graces that humanity needs». So you see how Jesus' response and this mysterious dialogue between Jesus and Mary open up for us this week the horizon of a profound theology of Mary, a true Mariology. As an ecclesiologist, Saint John also had a profound understanding of the theology of the church as expressed through the various signs in the life of Christ, and these signs truly have much to teach us.

Our attitude as church should be like that of Mary: both trusting and active. We should pray as though everything depended on God and work as though everything depended on us. Indeed, no sooner had Mary made her request of Jesus than she told the servants, «Let us do our part. Let us fill the water jars, and let us do what he says» (John 2:5). A miracle can't happen when people are only waiting for God to act. We have to do all that we're capable of doing. (Applause) The miracle happens but not without our doing something. Mary is the most marvelous combination of faith and action, and that is what every Catholic should be as well: a

marvelous combination both of human values and of faith that trusts completely in God. We need to believe in our human action and place our confidence in human beings.

It is in today's second reading that I find what I've referred to as «Mary, the figure of a church rich in charisms». I recall that when Pope Paul VI traveled to Fatima, there was a picture of him presenting a silver or gold rosary to an image of the Virgin of Fatima, and someone who was inspired by that picture said that it represented the summit of charism meeting with the summit of hierarchy. The church is hierarchy and charism. The hierarchy is made up of the pope, the bishops, the priests, and all those who carry on the mission of Christ who said, «As the Father has sent me, so I send you» (John 20:21). Charism is that whole complex of qualities that arise in the people of God and that are reviewed and ordered by the hierarchy for the common good. Charism and hierarchy cannot be separated. Mary is not hierarchy. Mary was not chosen to be the pope. Mary was not made a priest by Christ to celebrate the sacraments. Mary remained a woman of the people like you, my esteemed sisters.

But Mary had something else: a wealth of charism. Charisms are all the graces that God gives to a person so that the person will play a useful role in the community. Mary is the model of all those who use their charisms to serve the community. That's why we bishops find in her a model for our pastoral ministry. That's why married couples find in her a model of matrimonial love. That's why young people find in her the joyfulness of youth and why children find in her a mother's confidence. Mary has everything the church needs for her charismatic dimension.

That is why Mary cannot be absent from any heart or any home. We all need her. She didn't have the hierarchical powers Saint Peter had. She didn't have the power to forgive sins or celebrate Mass. God wanted to channel those hierarchical powers through ministerial service. And we should not look down on the church as a hierarchical institution because Christ wanted those official channels in order to keep the church united in community. But that hierarchical authority would be of no use if the Spirit, who gave me the vocation to be a priest, had not also bestowed on the people of God the charisms that I behold before me at this very moment: the marvelous faith of people who hear me and are moved by the Holy Spirit to put into deeds what we are reflecting on together. All that is charism. You give life to the message I am preaching because you carry it forth from the teaching hierarchy and apply it charismatically to your lives and to the world.

Mary is the wonderful sign that appears in the epistle we read today. I ask you to reflect seriously on that reading because I believe that there we also find a way to resolve our national problems. It is clear that Saint Paul is speaking of the Christian community, the people of God, which we have carefully distinguished from the «natural people». However, that figure of the people of God—all of us baptized persons who constitute the church—provides much illumination as well for the natural people.

I have already told you that in Europe's early days the Benedictine monasteries were a model of civilization because the monks who lived there had a wonderfully balanced sense of authority and freedom. Since that was a model for the larger societies as well, people copied those Christian communities to create our western civilization. If here in El Salvador we Christians formed true Christian communities; if we were truly children of one Father; if we were God's people inspired by faith, enlightened by hope, and moved by fraternal love; then our religious communities and our base communities of Christians would be providing a model for how our Salvadoran society should be organized. (Applause)

If the church puts into practice what Saint Paul has said today, how can she not be a model for the nation? Saint Paul tells us, «There are different kinds of gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different ways of working but the same God who is active in everyone. In every person the Spirit is revealed for the common good» (1 Cor 12:4-7). Consider what a wise principle this is: «In every person the Spirit is revealed for the common good». Not all of us serve for everything, but all of us serve for something, and that collection of «somethings» constitutes the common good. Since each of us receives from the Holy Spirit the qualities we have, we should place them at the service of the common good. «And so one person receives from the Spirit the gift of speaking with wisdom, and another the gift of speaking with intelligence. Still another receives by the same Spirit the gift of faith», and so on (1 Cor 12:8-9). Paul lists the various charisms and concludes by saying, «One and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them to each person as he chooses» (1 Cor 12:11).

Today we call this «pluralism»: different ways of thinking, different political projects, different options. But what is beautiful is that each one of us, sisters and brothers, according to our different options, can seek the common good. Using what we have received from the Spirit, we can build the common homeland, sharing together what each of us has received. The Lord's word today is truly giving us a marvelous solution: not only will we be a church united in the Spirit and serving the same Lord, but we will be a model for our country. Tragically, and I say this with shame, we are not united even as the people of God. Still, this is the work of all of us; let all of us do what we can. At least let no one be the cause of division. Let us generously share the gifts we have received in service to others. If the others don't want to receive our gifts, then the fault is not ours. Let us at least be convinced that all we have received from the Lord is to be placed at the service of all.

By faith we share in the joy and glory of salvation

I conclude my meditation with this final reflection that comes at the end of today's gospel: «Thus Jesus did the first of the signs revealing his glory, and his disciples' faith in him increased» (John 2:11). I would like to be able to say the same thing about all of us who are reflecting on these words: that our faith in Jesus has grown, that our sense of church has grown, and our sense of nation as well. Let us finish our reflection today with the same joy and optimism that Christ wanted to inspire by working his first sign: the joy of a banquet, the joy of collaborating with him, and steadfast confidence in the most difficult moments.

Many of those disciples who were with Christ were also disciples of John the Baptist, but now they moved to a new stage. John the Baptist reached the final stages of the Old Testament, but now these men whom John the Baptist had entrusted to Christ, were discovering in Christ that God was entering history. They believed that Christ was the Savior sent by God, that Jesus was the Lord's salvation. As Saint John would later write, remembering the profound experience the disciples had had: «We saw his glory, the glory of the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth. We have eaten with him. We have touched him» (John 1:14). Such also should be the extraordinary testimony that we give as Christians: «We know him. We know that he exists in history. We have been with him this morning at Mass. He has taught us and filled us with optimism». Let us carry to every place this marvel of trusting in the Lord, and let us also do what we must do on our part. Our Christian attitude should be marked by a confident spirit and a sense of responsibility in our work, for there is no problem that Christ cannot solve.

What our country needs more than anything at this moment is people who place all their trust in Christ and who work with utmost ardor for the nation. (Applause)

Life of the church

I'm going to try to apply the marvelous doctrine in today's gospel to our own reality, for that is the reason we meditate on the Gospel: so that our church becomes ever more solidly established in the principles of the faith and from that faith illuminates also the reality around us. In this way the Christian community will truly be the model for civil society; it will be a community that adds spice and salt to the food of history. The first thing, then, is to look at our church: is our activity and our work truly building up this church so beautifully transfigured today in Mary? Are we creating a church rich in charisms and powerful in intercession?

What does it mean that today we are celebrating the anniversary of the violent deaths of Father Octavio Ortiz and four young people in El Despertar? Father Rafael told me that a novena was held there, and it concluded with a vigil last night; it was a time for profound reflection. I rejoice that the death of priests and young Christians has encouraged our communities and has not diminished the ardor of our faith. (Applause) They are now preparing the final celebration, which will be today: a procession that will end at the church of San Francisco in Mejicanos. At eleven o'clock I will have the joy of celebrating Mass there beside the tomb of Father Octavio. I have warm memories of how one year ago, at the entrance to the cathedral, we celebrated a funeral with four coffins that was more like an Easter filled with new life. Since it was during the week of Christian unity, we had with us our friend, Doctor Lara Braud, whom you already know and who spoke some memorable words in honor of our martyrs.

This year again, since January 18, our church has joined with Protestant denominations in an octave of prayer for unity. It's sad that, even as efforts toward unity and understanding are being made, we hear of events such as those described by Father Interiano of Candelaria, Cuscatlán. He wrote to me the following: «I regret to send you this information. Tomorrow Saturday is the end of the proselytizing campaign of a Protestant sect from Cojutepeque. They have been using powerful speakers in the main plaza every night since last Saturday, coinciding with Christian unity week. Respectfully,...» It seems to me to be a contradictory sign when Christians who are being called by the church to expunge the sin of our disunity are instead fomenting disunity. I invite you to participate fervently in this octave of prayer. If we can't attend public services, then let us do something in private for the unity of Christians, for this is what Christ longs for: that all believe in him and be united as one (John 17:21). (Applause) Tonight the ecumenical prayer service will be in the church of San Francisco in Mejicanos. There, beside the tomb of Father Octavio, both Catholics and Protestants will join together to pray. On Wednesday of this week the service will be here in the basilica. I'm inviting you right now so that on Wednesday at seven in the evening we'll be here for this service of ecumenical prayer.

Sisters Nicolasa and Beatriz, who were working in Arcatao and spoke to you here last Sunday, traveled to Mexico by order of their superiors. They go with the gratitude of our people and with the hope that they will return because their hearts are still there in Arcatao, and leaving was harder for them than staying. I think they really will have to return so that that community, which loves them dearly and is suffering terribly, may be consoled by their

religious sisters. A time of rest and a little distance will help them gain new breath so they can return to work with renewed vigor.

Yesterday there was a meeting of the men and women religious of El Salvador. They have joined together in an institution called CONFRES, the Conference of Religious of El Salvador. Religious life is one of the great forces for pastoral ministry in all of Latin America. Their efforts to become more holy and to work together in different areas of religious life are a source of great hope for our archdiocese and for all the dioceses of El Salvador

That same religious life is being enriched today as three Somascan novices make their profession in the basilica of La Ceiba. We congratulate them, and we're delighted that that congregation is adding three new members to its number today.

From Thursday to Saturday there was a pastoral study program on the ecclesial base communities, during which the pastoral agents learned a great deal about creating ecclesial base communities, a pastoral practice that our archdiocese highly prizes.

Our office for social communications was obliged to make a clarification about the anonymous notice and the false news report that were broadcast on Radio Sonora. Supposedly a pseudo-priest working with the archdiocese, who goes by the name Federico López Pérez, had reported that there were plans to set fire to the basilica. We have stated that there is no such priest working in our offices and we know nothing about such a report. I see a danger in the way anonymous notices are being announced in radio broadcasts and during talk shows. I want to thank Radio Sonora and YSU for the invitations they've extended to me, but I have thought it best not to take part, precisely because of this abusive practice of broadcasting anonymous reports that tend to be offensive and distorted. In any case, I already have available, thank God, these marvelous broadcasts of my homilies as well as the dialogues on YSAX whenever we want to hold them. (Applause) It would be good for you to take these anomalies into account. The efforts to place the mass media at the service of the people are no doubt noble, but we have to be very careful that the media are not abused. (Applause)

Last Sunday I took part in the conference of the laity of the vicariate of Cuscatlán. They met in San Pedro Perulapán and were very excited about the way our diocese is promoting the work of the laity everywhere.

On the feast of the Lord of Esquipulas, I joined in a very vibrant patronal feast in Aguilares, where there are some very fine ecclesial base communities. When they come together in big parish celebrations, they impart profound meaning to the community prayer.

The next day I was in the village of San Miguelito, Chalatenango, where I shared in the «Palm Sunday» joy of the children, who were waving palm branches. We climbed up the hill to the chapel, where we celebrated the Eucharist.

The scene was similar in San Ignacio, Chalatenango, where Father Vito had prepared for confirmations. More scenic still was the drive up to Las Pilas, beyond Miramundo, near what they say is the highest peak in El Salvador, with an altitude of 2,300 meters. You find yourself there very close to heaven and with a community that is overflowing with God. They also hear

our broadcasts, so I take this chance to greet them and congratulate them from the cathedral, which is today the basilica³.

As we did at the other Masses, we had first communions and confirmations in La Palma, which is the seat of that parish. As is customary there, eighteen *campesinos* were authorized to take communion to their villages and to keep the Eucharist in the chapel so that the people can worship the Lord. I was filled with much joy as I beheld these holy persons who are quite capable of undertaking these ministries and services of our church.

Another service was rendered to our church by Roberto Cuéllar, who represented the archdiocesan Legal Aid Office at the human rights conference in Costa Rica from the second to the sixteenth of this month. Various countries of Central America participated in the conference. Mr. Cuellar is now back with us, working as always with our archdiocesan office.

While reporting these news items of our diocese in this family setting, I want also to announce to you that next Friday, God willing, I will leave for Louvain to receive an honorary doctorate, and I'll return two weeks later. I'll return on a Friday, bringing back this honor which I will receive in the name of the whole of this beloved community. I feel you are the ones who are truly being decorated with this homage that is being bestowed on me by that university. (Applause)

I'm going pass over news from the world since you already know it. You realize that the pope is aware of situations around the world and that he always offers opportune statements that encourage us and keep our faith alive to the rhythms of the signs of history. I especially want to note that the pope sees great danger for world peace in the situation in Afghanistan. He has urged the world powers to fulfill their responsibilities for preserving peace. He said that the church's mission commits her to the independence of all countries and to the right of people to decide their own destiny according to their patriotic and religious convictions⁴. (Applause)

Events of the week

Accordingly, encouraged by the word of God and concerned about the fierce violence that has affected different parts of our country, I feel again obliged to renew my appeal to all Christians and all persons of good will: let us consider seriously the present moment of our nation, and let us act responsibly to keep it from falling into total civil war.

I'm going to present you the facts, and then we will try to analyze them with pastoral criteria. It is evident that at the present time in El Salvador there are three politico-economic projects that are vying with each other, and each one seeks to be the only one that prevails.

First there is the project of the oligarchy, which plans to use its immense economic might to prevent the implementation of any structural reforms that will benefit the majority of Salvadorans but will also affect their interests. By means of political and economic pressure,

³ Archbishop Romero celebrated the Mass in the Basilica of the Sacred Heart because the cathedral was occupied by trade unionists and members of the BPR. *El Diario Latino* (14 January 1980).

⁴ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See», 14 January 1980, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (20 January 1980).

and even by violence, this system seeks to maintain the present oligarchic economic structure, which is patently unjust and has reached the point of being intolerable. To help them defend their oligarchic interests, they have succeeded in enlisting the support of the private business sector and evidently also a part of the army. Moreover, it is rumored that they have contracted mercenaries to wage war unscrupulously against any other force that attempts to redistribute the national income and wealth. The murderously criminal services of the UGB have been requested, and they are already at work⁵.

Second, there is the government project, promoted by the Armed Forces and the Christian Democratic Party. Even though the Armed Forces published a manifesto⁶ declaring a pro-people, anti-oligarchic stance and promised to undertake structural reforms, in practice it has so far been incapable of bringing together the different sectors and organizations of the people. Instead, it has dedicated itself to repressing and massacring *campesinos* and other sectors of the people in indiscriminate and disproportionate ways. This is what is happening now, for example, in the zone of Arcatao. So this is the second project.

The third project is the one presented by the people's organizations and the politico-military groups. It is a project that is moving them quickly toward unity. An appeal has been made to all democratic organizations, progressive individuals, small and medium-sized business owners, and conscientious soldiers to form a broad, powerful coalition of revolutionary, democratic forces that will make it possible for social justice and democracy to prevail in our country. This people's project has so far succeeded in initiating a process of unification and coordination among the different people's organizations⁷ and politico-military groups⁸, but that effort still needs to be extended more particularly to the democratic, progressive sectors so that there will be a broad united front that truly seeks the common good of the country and that tries as much as possible to prevent violence, vengeance, and all other activities that add to the bloodshed.

Regarding these three politico-economic projects, I believe that our pastoral judgment should be as follows. First of all, we remind you once again that the church should not identify with one project rather than another, nor should she be a leader in what is an eminently political process. Something I wrote in my fourth pastoral letter seems to me very relevant today: «What most truly interests the church is offering the country the light of the Gospel for the salvation and the integral development of our people. This salvation involves changing the structures in which people live so that they help people to live fully as children of God rather than preventing them from doing so»⁹. This is the mission of the church, a wholly evangelical one. No community or pastoral agent can say that any particular project is the project of the Christian community. The job of the Christian community is to promote humankind according to the Gospel and to support human development here on earth by working ourselves and

⁵ «UGB Threatens Leftist Leaders» in *La Prensa Gráfica*, (17 January 1980).

⁶ «The Armed Forces Address the Salvadoran People», 9 January 1980, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (10 January 1980).

⁷ «Our Popular Organizations Are Moving Toward Unity. Manifesto of the BPR, the UDN, the FAPU and the LP-28», 11 January 1980, *ECA*, 375-376 (1980) 128-130.

⁸ On 10 January 1980 two politico-military organizations, the FPL and the FARN, and the Communist Party of El Salvador also announced the beginning of a unifying process. «Manifesto of the Communist Party of El Salvador, the FPL, and the FARN», 10 January 1980, *ECA*, 375-376 (1980) 133-136. The ERP and the PRTC joined the process on May 22, and on 10 October 1980 the five organizations established the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN, *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional*).

⁹ «The Church's Mission in the Midst of the Nation's Crisis» (6 August 1979) 31.

inspiring others to work for social structures that favor the integral fulfillment of human beings. Accordingly, the light needed to illuminate the projects I've already mentioned has an evangelical, moral character.

Concretely, with regard to the first project, that of the oligarchy, I cannot approve it but must rather condemn it. (Applause) I must disapprove of the conduct of those persons who, in seeking to defend their privileges and their accumulated riches and refusing to share them in solidarity with all Salvadorans, are making it ever more difficult to resolve the country's structural crisis in a peaceful way. I take the liberty to remind this oligarchic sector once again of what Medellín taught: «If they zealously hold on to their privileges and especially if they defend them by violent means, then they make themselves responsible before history for provoking explosive revolutions of desperation» (M 2,17). Their attitude will determine in large part the future of peace in El Salvador. (Applause)

The economically powerful should also remember these words of Pope John Paul II in his inaugural address at Puebla: «Yes, the church defends the legitimate right to private property, but she also teaches with no less clarity that all private property carries with it a social mortgage»¹⁰. The image is superb: no one can own a property without having it mortgaged to the common good. (Applause) «And the reason for this», says the pope, «is so that material goods will serve the purpose for which God has given them to us. And if the common good demands it»—exact words of the pope—«there should be no hesitation in expropriating property in due legal form»¹¹.

With regard to the second project, that of the government, I first of all cite some conclusions of former government functionaries so that the people may judge the matter objectively. According to these former officials, «there is no longer any possibility of pursuing reformist solutions in alliance with the presence leadership of the Armed Forces, which is dominated by pro-oligarchic elements and allows no real participation of the people»¹². The solution these former officials propose is «to establish a democratic government that defends authentic social justice». (Applause) «As a basic element», they say, «such a government would demand the participation and the guidance of the people and their democratic organizations, and it would directly confront the oligarchy and its allies»¹³.

I believe that the members of the Christian Democratic Party and the others involved in the present government should take seriously this opinion based on the experience of the former officials. They should join with the military men who still have not abandoned their desires for change and justice, and they should dialogue with the people's organizations and with other democratic and progressive groups. In this way they can discover the best way to create the broad government proposed by the same people's organizations and the former officials, a government based not on the present Armed Forces but on the majority consensus of the organized people. (Applause) For there can never be any stability in a government which, despite its promises of change and social justice, is day by day disgracing itself with the

¹⁰ Although John Paul II spoke of the «social mortgage» in his inaugural address in Puebla, the text that Archbishop Romero cites here comes from the pope's address in Oaxaca: JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Campesinos and Indigenous Peoples of Oaxaca», 29 January 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (11 February 1979).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² «Analysis of the Present Political Moment by Former Officials of the Government So That the Salvadoran People Can Judge», 12 January 1980, in *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 January 1980).

¹³ Ibid.

cruel repression about which alarming reports are reaching us from every part of the country. The people themselves are being sacrificed in places like Las Vueltas and Arcatao. You can read the facts in today's issue of *Orientación*¹⁴.

I'm not going to take up more of your time, but what has happened in the region around Arcatao is something cruel. Under the pretext of finding or avenging a soldier who had disappeared or of flushing out pockets of guerrillas, they are threatening and indiscriminately killing the rural population. I recognize that it is senseless and wrong to kill people solely because they belong to organizations like ORDEN or the National Guard. I denounced such crimes last Sunday when I made an appeal not to inflame the situation there. Today I condemn what is equally deplorable, the totally disproportionate punishment that is being inflicted on the *campesinos*, many of whom are totally innocent.

I received a letter from the wife of the soldier who has disappeared. I believe that as human beings we must sympathize with her sorrow. She learned about the tragic case of her husband precisely from our homily last Sunday. She didn't know anything. She then wrote to me and brought me the letter personally: «With my eyes set on God and on you, I come with these humble words to beg you once again to intercede on behalf of my husband, José Elías Torres Quintanilla, soldier of the National Guard, who was kidnapped on January 12 of this year by elements of a clandestine organization while traveling from Arcatao to Chalatenango. Until now I know nothing of his whereabouts. I hope that your assistance will relieve my anxiety as spouse and mother of an eight-month-old child. We need my husband. May God reward you for all your kindnesses and for what you can do to help us». Last night I heard reports—I don't know whether they've been confirmed—that they had found the body of the disappeared soldier. We can never approve of something like this. It is a crime. The pope has said that such things must be called by their proper name¹⁵.

We also have an eyewitness account of what is happening there. A *campesino* writes me the following: «We are very sad right now in this department because they have unleashed the cruelest persecution and slaughter against *campesinos*—women, men, children, everyone. The maltreatment comes at the hands of the authorities and elements of ORDEN and has given rise to a panic never before seen in this northern region. We have witnessed it personally because here where we live we are surrounded by refugees who have arrived with only the clothes they were wearing. They have no way of returning to their homes, where they left everything abandoned. Their houses have been plundered and some of them set on fire. Their animals have been robbed or slaughtered. Their grains have been destroyed, and there are countless other abuses inflicted on these poor folk whose only crime is being poor and being organized».

Also, one of the sisters who is leaving the region wrote to me, «We leave with great sadness because we see that the repression is not just a reaction to the soldier who was kidnapped. Rather, they are taking advantage of this situation and are repressing the people according to plans made beforehand at the highest level of authority. We are pained by the price in bloodshed that the people must pay for their liberation. This is a price we cannot accept as Christians, but when there is no remedy, we give it meaning by joining it with the crucified Lord so that it attains its redemptive value». (Applause)

¹⁴ «More Violence and Persecution» in *Orientación* (20 January 1980).

¹⁵ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse of John Paul II to Young People at the General Audience», 21 February 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (25 February 1979).

The governing junta must decisively command an immediate halt to all this indiscriminate repression because the junta itself is responsible for the great bloodshed and suffering among the people. The Armed Forces and the security forces above all must put aside their cruelty and hatred in persecuting the people. They must show with deeds that they are on the side of the majority and that the process they have begun is for the benefit of the people. You soldiers—or many of you—come from among the people yourselves, and therefore the military institutions should be at the service of the people. Don't destroy the people! Don't do anything to provoke the still greater and more painful outbursts of violence with which a repressed people might justly respond. (Applause)

I have a very revealing, heartfelt letter from a group of soldiers. I'm going to read the part that is of most interest to us:

As a group of soldiers, we ask if you can help publicize the problems we have and the demands we are making to the officials and commanders of the governing junta. We thank you beforehand for your assistance. What we want to try to achieve is improvement of the conditions for the troops of the FAES, namely:

First, better food.

Second, elimination of beatings and other outrages against the troops.

Third, better clothing for the troops.

Fourth, increase in our salary since what we receive now is twenty or thirty *colones* a month, which ends up as nothing after all the deductions are made. (Applause)

Fifth, that we not be sent out to repress the people. (Applause)

Dear soldiers, in this applause of the people you can find a hand extended to help you in your anguish. They continue their demands:

Sixth, that we not be charged for the maintenance of our clothing.

Seventh, that we be given the reasons for why we are sent into combat. (Applause)

Eighth, the Armed Forces are composed of troops, commanders, and officials, and it is only the commanders and officials who are responsible for all the oppression committed against the people. (Applause)

Ninth, increase in our life insurance which is now only two thousand *colones*.

Tenth and last, we call on the people in general—workers, *campesinos*, and students—and on the people's revolutionary organizations and associations to support us in our struggle to achieve better conditions. In return, we will take responsibility for making sure the Armed Forces protect and defend the interests of the people and not those of the rich, as has been the case until now. (Applause)

I can only comment: from the lowly comes the light!

If the government project on which we're now commenting wants to survive, it must amputate without delay or regret the rotten part and keep the sound part. (Applause) Any project which, out of either fear or selfish interests, tries to give an honest semblance to that which cannot be made honest is doomed to failure and will not help toward stability among the people.

I am going to refer, third, to the people's project. I view as especially hopeful the efforts at better coordination because they include an invitation to the other democratic sectors of the country and seek to join with them in a broad, powerful unity. I hope that this invitation is sincere and that it is backed up by an open, flexible attitude that allows for joint planning and execution of a politico-economic project that can both capture the majority consensus of the people and guarantee respect for development of the faith and the Christian values of the people. (Applause)

The pope has said that political projects must show much respect for the sentiments of the people. I say the same thing now, applying it to El Salvador, where anti-communist propaganda—clearly often hypocritical—is accusing certain organizations, mainly their leadership, of wanting to sow among us ideologies that in no way agree with our Salvadoran, Christian character. That is why the people's project with its call to unity must keep in mind the development of our faith and of the Christian values of our people, and as church I will always insist on it. (Applause)

I want to say the same to those who support the people's project as I said to the government: words and promises are not enough, especially when they're bellowed out with demagogic frenzy. Deeds are needed. For my part, as pastor I will be watchful to see whether the deeds in fact demonstrate that the people's organizations are capable of advancing a broad unity with the characteristics I just mentioned.

I also tell the people's organizations—especially those of a military and guerrilla nature, whatever their ideology—that they should halt their acts of violence and terrorism now. Such acts are often senseless and provoke even more violent situations. I tell, with the words of Puebla: «Violence inexorably engenders new forms of oppression and bondage, which usually prove to be more severe than those from which liberation was sought. But most important, violence is an attack on life, and life depends on the Creator alone. We must also assert that whenever an ideology appeals to violence, it is thereby admitting its own weakness and inadequacy» (P 532). (Applause)

In light of these criteria I must make mention of some acts of violence and other outrages that the church deplores even as she accompanies the victims in solidarity. Organizations have occupied the church of El Rosario, the Externado San José, and the cathedral, and I am told that churches in other towns have also been occupied. Regarding these occupations, I believe I can repeat what YSAX said in its commentaries about the occupation of the embassy of Panama by the LP-28. Our station declared: «In these days when the people's coalition is seeking international support, this occupation is a false step that does nothing to improve the credibility of the people's organizations». (Applause) Applying this to our churches, I would also ask why, at this time when the organizations are calling the people to unity, are the sincere sentiments of our people who flock to the churches being disrespected? (Applause) I hope that the organizations will act more maturely and stop playing around with something so serious. The temples we dedicate to God should be respected if we are truly on the people's side and want to defend their rights. The people's most sacred right is the right to enter a church to adore their God with sincerity of soul. (Applause)

Let us also include here the matter of kidnappings, which are also violent acts that disrupt the peace process in the country. I received a very nice letter from Don José Antonio Morales, who asks me to thank God for the release of his grandson, Fidelito, who was

kidnapped some months ago. Don José relates what he went through: «It is distressing to know that there are people who have hearts that are capable of making a child suffer what this child says he suffered while kidnapped. He was obliged to take narcotics. But what saddens me most is that those individuals would have felt obliged to kill the boy if we didn't pay the money they demanded. He said that he thought about his mother and father, and about all of us he would never see again. At the same time we were feeling a similar anguish since we were quite unable to pay the ransom. The only hope that sustained us was a miracle of God». He then tells how that miracle of God happens when there is faith in prayer. This is a testimony, then, of what we hear preached in today's gospel, and I offer it as an example to you and to myself.

In the name of human rights, I thank the ERP for their willingness to heed our plea to postpone the final decision in the case of Jaime Hill Argüello¹⁶. YSAX commented, «What we ask above all is that the ERP be realistic and accept the national and international conditions that frame their action». I insist that there is an urgent need to negotiate the possible conditions for resolving this vexing situation. The wife and the family of Mr. Hill state that they are willing to do whatever they can to save his life, but they are being asked for what is impossible, and nobody is obliged to do what is impossible. They earnestly plead that they be offered a chance for real negotiation.

In this regard also, the family of Mr. Dunn, the former ambassador of South Africa, has asked the FPL to make the channels of negotiation more agile so as to put an end to this conflict. They claim that they have already carried out the publicity that the FPL proposed, and now they ask them not to be so intransigent in demanding what for them is impossible. This family has practically no national support in their own country, and they find themselves in a very precarious situation economically. Since they were confident enough to ask me to be mediator, I for my part ask that these conditions be given consideration and that the release of Mr. Dunn be speeded up.

I am also concerned about other kidnapping cases that I won't mention so as not to go on too long¹⁷. But I do make a plea to those who are responsible for them: do whatever you can to respect the rights of the victims so that we will deserve to have God grant us solutions for our national problems.

While speaking about denunciations and correspondence, I mention also the report from the community of Tamanique, which tells us that on January 14 three soldiers from La Libertad entered the San Alfonso estate, searched two houses, and committed other abuses. I am very pained to hear that they also committed outrages with the Bible, throwing it to one side and using foul language.

Relatives of Julio César Quinteros Cortés, who was killed by the ERP on the grounds that he was an active member of the political police, have rejected that accusation. They said that it is untrue that he was called Julio César Flores, and they brought documents to our office that gave evidence of this¹⁸. They have asked that this mistake, which had tragic consequences, be clarified in this homily.

¹⁶ *El Diario Latina* (17 January 1980).

¹⁷ Jaime Batlle was kidnapped on 13 September 1979, and Adolfo McEntee was kidnapped for the second time on 3 December 1979.

¹⁸ «ERP Claims Responsibility for the Death of the Hardee's Employee» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (17 January 1980).

The UDN has also asked me to denounce the capture of their companion, Andrés Isabel Mejía Flores, mayor of San Cayetano Istepeque, and of his son, Napoleón Hernández Mejía. They were arrested by agents of the National Guard and the army at their home on Tuesday, January 15, at two-thirty in the afternoon¹⁹. I have also received visits and explanations from their family that make it clear that the accusations are false. They urgently ask for their quick release.

The UND also denounces the kidnapping of Lorenza Guardado on January 12, one block from the National Guard post in San Miguel. They also denounce the assault on the student Ovidio Martínez.

I couldn't read it last Sunday because it arrived late, but I have a letter from the UR-19 and the AGEUS asking me to denounce the repression of the *campesinos* in the Chalatenango area, as well as the deplorable situation of slum dwellers and that of the workers whose factories have been closed. The documents they enclose are very extensive, and there's no time to read them, but as you yourselves observe in your letter, you can be assured of the church's solidarity and of her efforts to defend these distressed sectors of our people.

Also, the STIMES-affiliated workers on routes 13, 14, and 15 of the SASHA bus company have made me aware of their demands for more humane treatment and a salary increase. I thank them for their expressions of solidarity with the church, and I pray to God that these conflicts will be resolved through considerate dialogue.

With regard to the Sara Rest Home, someone has said, «It's no longer a quiet place for the elderly. We should call it the home of terror and death». They report that on December 3 the nurse Ana Isabel García Montoya was killed at the entrance of the home, and at the beginning of this month of January the watchman Andrés Lemos was killed at his post near the entrance. Moreover, they complain of the many false denunciations and accusations made by telephone.

You are all aware, from the papers, of the widespread violence, but I was especially disturbed by one report: seventy-two buses have been torched since May, often with bloodshed²⁰.

Legal Aid reports that the body of German Flores Sañas from Armenia has been identified. In September 1979, when this man was arrested, Legal Aid presented a petition of habeas corpus, and the Investigatory Commission for Political Prisoners and Disappeared Persons stated that they had collected sufficient evidence of his detention. The commission also said that it was presumed that he was killed after his arrest, and this was confirmed with the discovery of his body. It is deplorable that the list of disappeared persons is growing shorter not because they are reappearing alive but because we keep finding corpses.

Forty families who were evicted from their houses in the slums now have a problem of where to live. They tried to negotiate with Social Security since they wanted to build dwellings near the Social Security offices, but they were evicted from there. They took refuge and found

¹⁹«Mayor and His Secretary Arrested for Subversion» in *La Prensa Gráfica* (18 January 1980).

²⁰ *El Diario de Hoy* (17 January 1980).

shelter in the Externado San José, and they occupied the church of El Rosario as a sign of protest. The problem of housing for people in precarious situations is serious, and it demands much love and ingenuity on the part of those who are charged with finding solutions. So I ask that everything possible be done for these diverse sectors of our people.

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, I make an appeal to all sectors of the nation: let us avoid the need to engage in a civil war, and let us use every means possible to achieve authentic justice in our country. To achieve that, we must all be willing to share with one another what we are and what we have. We must be willing to participate, according to our abilities, in the creation of politico-economic structures that are in accord with the plan of God and that benefit all Salvadorans evenhandedly.

I appeal most especially to those of you who are unorganized and who have so far remained on the sidelines of political events even though you are suffering their consequences. Along with Medellín, I recommend that «you work for justice with the means at your disposal and not remain passive for fear of the personal sacrifices and risks that every bold and truly effective action implies. (Applause) Otherwise, you also will share responsibility for the injustice and its dreadful consequences» (M 2,18). (Applause)

But let it be quite clear that, in calling for the people to organize, I am not saying that you should join one organization or another. I simply mean to say that you should each make your own critical judgment for the sake of the common good, just as Saint Paul recommends to us today when he says that the Spirit gives us gifts not for our personal benefit but for the benefit of all (1 Cor 12:7).

I insist with our beloved Christian communities that they don't need to be politicized in order to make their salutary contribution to the country. Rather, they need to maintain their ecclesial identity, as I explain in my second pastoral letter²¹. That doesn't mean that Christians should avoid politics, but it does mean that they should distinguish between their role in a Christian community and their role in a political party or organization. Let us now more than ever nourish our faith with the word of God and with the church's social doctrine. Beware of ideologies, especially those that attack our faith. I urge all Christians to pray that the Savior of the world will grant us the grace to remain faithful to the liberating mission he has entrusted to us.

Like Mary at the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, let us have faith that Christ is present in the midst of our problems, and let us orient our activities toward the miraculous, certain that Christ will work that miracle for us if we collaborate with him in the transformation of our country. (Applause)

²¹ *The Church as the Body of Christ in History* (6 August 1977).