

**145**

## **BY HIS COVENANT GOD ADOPTS US INTO HIS OWN FAMILY**

**The Blessed Trinity**

**10 June 1979**

Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40

Romans 8:14-17

Matthew 28:16-20

Dear sisters and brothers, today is the feast of the Blessed Trinity, which is nothing less than a feast in honor of God. «Trinity» is the expression by which Christians designate the true God who, while remaining one alone, has three distinct persons who are called the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Having celebrated the mystery of Christ who saved the world, it is quite logical for us to ascend with him into the heights from which this redemption proceeded. Likewise, since we have received the Spirit who came from on high to infuse his divine life into this church that is all of us, it is only logical that this Spirit will help us to travel upriver to reach the source of divinity. And that is the meaning of today's feast: returning to the origin and the finality of the whole mystery of Christ that we as church keep alive.

This feast, therefore, turns out to be the crowning moment of the Easter season and the celebration of our redemption. As we've said many times, it all began with the Father who loved us and sent his Son to save us and to carry out our redemption; it continued with the Son who accomplished the mission and returned to the Father; and finally the two of them sent us the Holy Spirit. So for us this feast is not only a feast of God but a feast of all the people who believe in God. It is the feast of all of us who believe and are blessed by faith in our Lord.

I most heartily applaud all those who keep this faith. I am happy that your coming to Mass on Sunday is a sign of the faith that bonds us together and makes us one single family, the family of God. Because if there is no faith in God, then all the mystery of the world and of humankind becomes an unsolvable mystery, a senseless absurdity, especially when the world is in turmoil, as is the case now with our country, our people, our situation—and just look at the turmoil there in Nicaragua. There are so many things that cannot be explained. Only by soaring up to those heights through a profound faith in God can we gain the perspective that helps us see the reasons for what seems absurd on earth.

This is the message given us by the divine word on this feast of the Blessed Trinity. We have woven together the messages of Lent and Holy Week and Easter and have used the idea of the covenant between God and humankind to give unity to all the Sundays of the year. So if we now view the feast of the Blessed Trinity under the sign of the covenant, we could title our reflection this morning: «By his Covenant God Adopts Us into His Own Family». With very imperfect words this title reflects the great reality that we want to bear in mind this morning: through the covenant God wants to make with us, we are all adopted into the very family of God. We are adopted children of God's family if we are willing to participate in the covenant that God offers us this very morning.

The three thoughts of my reflection are found in the three readings. In the first reading we discover «the God of our fathers» (Acts 13:3), the monotheistic God of the old covenant, the «one God alone» of Israel. In the gospel the risen Jesus Christ appears full of God's power, sending the apostles to preach his message to the world. Here we find a significant advance in the revelation of the God of our fathers. And Saint Paul gives God a new title, the one that we are going to use this morning: «the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ» (2 Cor 1:3). This, then, is our second thought: the God of Jesus Christ now reveals himself as a family: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. My third reflection is taken from the second reading, where Saint Paul shows how God make us his family through a covenant. By means of baptism we become adoptive members of that divine family. This is the great mystery of adoption, which is the work of the Holy Spirit sent by the Father and by the Son to make all men and women part of God's family, the people of God. Let us reflect clearly on these ideas so as to build up the family of God. Let us not confuse the whole mass of people with the people of God, for the latter is the family of God formed only by those who want to accept the covenant with God. We must distinguish, sisters and brothers, between the people in general and the people of God.

In El Salvador everyone is part of the people, but the people of God is made up only of those who believe in this mystery of God and become part of this covenant. The church therefore seeks to be that family of God that believes in the Father and in the redemption of the Son and in the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. The church tries to nourish herself with the word of God and the sacraments, and she tries to live true to herself without being confused with any other human group. She offers light to all human associations. She sends forth men and women who believe in God to create ferment in every sector of the world—political, social, and economic—but she does not identify with those institutions.

We must be very clear about this idea. Today, the feast of the Blessed Trinity, will give us an opportunity to clarify even more the meaning of this people of God that is formed by those who seek to follow God and be nourished by his Spirit. To the extent that we integrate ourselves into the family of God, the people of God, we will also be a human group that is luminous and useful to others; we will inspire hope and bring clarity and unity to the world. I urge you all, therefore, to be truly Christian and to be truly church. That doesn't mean that we ignore the struggles of the world. Not at all! I sense that some people are interested in twisting my preaching no matter how clear I try to be. I have always stated that the church does not identify with politics and temporal struggles, but I have also stated that this church brings light and energy to all temporal struggles. The church is not segregated from the world and hidden away in a closet. No, the church defines herself clearly as the family of God in order to be God's ferment in the midst of all the struggles and combats of humankind. The church is the handmaid of humanity, as the pope said this Sunday when he was leaving Poland, «Let us open the borders. In the church there is no room for imperialism. The church is service»<sup>1</sup>. The church serves the world!

### **The God of our fathers**

My first thought, the God of our fathers, is found in the first reading, which presents us with two ways of arriving at knowledge of God. The reading begins, «Ask now of the days of old,

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<sup>1</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Homily in Cracow at the Jubilee Mass for Saint Stanislaus», 10 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (24 June 1979).

before your time, from the day when God created the world: what people has heard the voice of God as Israel has?» (Deut 4:32-33). That means that since the beginning of the world God has revealed himself to all nations and to all people through creation itself, but there is also a specific word of revelation by which God makes himself manifest not through nature but by speaking directly to human beings.

The early mode of knowing God is mentioned in Saint Paul's letter to the Romans: «The invisible attributes of God are seen through his works, his eternal power, and his divinity so that they have no excuse for denying God» (Rom 1:20). Let us keep in mind this idea that the First Vatican Council of the last century defined as a dogma of faith: it is possible for human intelligence to discover God in creation by its own natural light and without need of religion (DV 2). This is called the intellectual path, a way of reflecting that leads us from creatures back to the Creator. That is why Saint Paul says, «They have no excuse for denying God because they have the book of creation open before their eyes» (Rom 1:20). And that is why our Christian faith teaches that ignorance about God or denial of God always implies a moral failing. Those who deny God do so not because they can't discover him but because something in their moral conduct does not allow them to see God, and that is why «they have no excuse». The atheists who boast about not believing in God are sinning. This is not prideful bluster; it is the sad truth. But it is not a truth based on the impossibility of knowing God; it is a sad truth based on the sin in one's soul.

Ignorance of God implies a moral failing, whether in the form of idle thought, darkened reason, hardened heart, blindness, or even madness. Only mad people are atheists or sinners. For the love of God, let no one glory in saying, «I do not believe in God». It's a shame that some people boast of being very scientific and say that they no longer believe in God because of their science. The day before yesterday I visited a sick elderly woman in a hospital. What feeling for God this woman had! She told me, «I have tried to inculcate faith in God in my children, and they wandered away, and I don't know how they're doing now». This is the truth. What she taught them with motherly tenderness and holiness gets lost. It gets lost in school, in the university, in books, in the groups that prescind from God—and they end up hardened and darkened by vices. For there is no greater deterrent for sinners than their faith in God who tells them, «Don't do it!» That's why it's better to toss out the idea of God, so that one can freely sin. Atheists have nothing to boast of; they are the fruit of a sinful situation that is unworthy of their humanity.

The Second Vatican Council has stated that the highest vocation of human beings is to achieve communion with the God who created them out of love (GS 19). We realize this when we discover that we did not make ourselves and that our parents did not make us either for they were only instruments of God—our life is from God! And through reflection—and if possible, through contemplation, which is the highest degree of prayer—we come to speak with God as one friend speaks with another. This is the most exalted state that a person can reach, entering into communion with God.

But this is the God of the philosophers, the God of reasoning. As Tertullian said in the fourth century or thereabouts, «The God of Athens is not the same as the God of Jerusalem»<sup>2</sup>. The God of Jerusalem, the one who is revealed in the Bible, doesn't require such metaphysical speculations. There's a beautiful moment in today's reading when Moses, the man who talked

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<sup>2</sup> TERTULLIAN, *De Praescriptione haereticorum*, VII, 9.

intimately with God, says to his people, «Was there ever a people like our own? Was such a thing ever heard of before? Did any people ever hear the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire?» (Deut 4:32-33). There follows a narration of biblical wonders: «Has any other god ever tried to seek out a nation from among the other peoples, by testings, by signs and wonders, by war, with his strong hand and powerful arm, and by great terrors, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt?» (Deut 4:34).

What a magnificent revelation! This is a revelation that has no need to go searching among creatures so as to mold a religion suited to the tastes of those who invented it. This is the great difference between the religion that God has revealed and the human religions invented by peoples and nations. The living God speaks. He manifests himself to his chosen people. He seeks out a nation as a boy seeks a girl to make her his wife. God searches among the nations to find a people with whom to make a covenant, and God's covenant with that people involves a certain kind of exclusiveness, just as a bridegroom loves his bride exclusively above all other young women. Through all the Old Testament, God loved in this marvelously preferential way, as Moses himself recognizes: «Where is the nation that is able to glory in such friendship with God?»

We must keep these marvelous deeds of God in mind at this time when our peoples are struggling for their liberation and for their dignity. It is wonderful to think that we can have recourse to this God of our fathers—with his «signs and wonders and strong arm in war» (Deut 4:34)—for he is also the God of our people. He is the God of those who believe in God and so are not atheists. He is not a weak God. Who knows if it's not the atheist who is really weak! The people who are most terrified and who pray with the greatest fear at the time of testing are those who say they don't believe in God. But we Christians know that God exists and that he is the God of our people, the God who accompanies us with great signs in our wars and struggles, the God who supports his people in their just demands. This marvelous God is the God whom we Christians have continually followed.

This is the God of revelation. There is no need for the grand philosophical abstractions of Athens. He is not a God of the philosophers. He is the God to whom Christ spoke, «“Father, I thank you because you have revealed these things to the simple and the humble and have hidden them from the wise and the proud» (Luke 10:21). He is the God of the humble. Let us thank God on this feast of the Blessed Trinity for, despite his greatness and exalted supremacy, he has wanted us to discover him, not through the marvelous prodigies of nature, but with the simplicity of children who learn from their mothers: «Be good because God is watching you! God loves you. God loves good children!» That is what we have learned from the Bible and from the lips of our mothers. It is Moses who speaks with the lips of our catechists. Listen to the Bible teaching us about the God of our fathers, about the God of Christian revelation, about Christ who became our brother in order to show us God's way.

## **Events of the week**

But I want to pause now, sisters and brothers, before speaking to you about the God of Jesus Christ and the God who sends us the Holy Spirit. The historical digression which I usually make at the end of my homily, I want to make here, in this context of the God of our fathers. For we are not simply remembering the history of Egypt and the exodus and the Promised Land, that time when the God of Israel manifested himself as a God present to his people. Let us keep very much in mind that he is the God who now, in 1979, is in Nicaragua and in El Salvador—and also

in Poland, where the pope has exposed tremendous disorder. He is the God who speaks sternly and forcefully and even militarily—and when necessary, with his words that lay things bare. What has happened among us this week that calls us to deep reflection by the light of this God of Israel? Let us behold him, God in El Salvador.

The UND party denounced the appearance of twenty-two bodies that have not been identified, many of them with signs of torture, as well as the murder of other victims that have been recognized by their relatives. The same declaration attributes the extreme violence affecting the country to police organizations connected with the government; it states that «it is worth noting that this is a method that has often been put into practice in our country by the security forces, and it always happens when a state of siege has been declared»<sup>3</sup>.

It's what we also said at the beginning. Let us hope that the state of siege will not coincide, as it has been known to do in our history, with an assault on people's dignity and freedom. Let it not serve as an excuse. The God of our people cannot approve of a law of this kind, one that aims only to repress. The God of our people is on the side of those corpses that cry out to heaven. He is on the side of the families that have been abandoned and distressed. How can the God of our people not be on the side of the fourteen teachers who have been murdered since April 24? During this month dedicated to teachers we remember the names of these dead teachers: Noel Saúl Ramos, Ricardo Villalobos, Emma Guadalupe Carpio, Rafael Vázquez Marín, Antonio Merino, René Mauricio Pacheco, Orlando Guerrero Chamul, Pedro Federico Colorado, Francisco Borja Caranza, René Guevara, Lázaro Arias, José Manuel Funes Minero, Manuel de Jesús Chávez, Héctor Joaquín Torres. Fourteen mentors of our children, killed!

I also want to denounce the systematic, malicious attack against the education being given in our Catholic schools<sup>4</sup>. As I've said a thousand times, the work the church is doing in the schools is aiming to awaken Christian consciences and impart a critical, liberating education. Such an education makes the students into useful, inventive men and women who will create a better future in their country. Yet when our schools do this, they are accused of giving «Marxist indoctrination». It is easy to apply this label in order to inspire hatred of our Christian educational efforts, but as Paul VI has said repeatedly and clearly, Christian education cannot prescind from authentic promotion of the human person.

There has also been repression of the unionists in the electrical industry, and some have been threatened with death. Two union members were recently arrested in El Cerrón Grande. We also have a list of persons who have been arrested without being brought before the courts—there is fear for their lives. They are Oscar Atilio Chicas, *campesino* Julián Mejía Ardón, Sara Brizuela, *campesino* Manuel Barahona Chávez, Cruz Flores, Domingo Murcia, Manuel Antonio Mejía, María Reina Mejía, Carlos Mejía, and Blanca Elia Beltrán. An eighteen-year old student, Carlos Durán, was also arrested and then killed; his body appeared in El Playón.

On June 4 a masked man, acting in the name of the armed movement called the White Warriors Union, entered the control room of the geothermal plant in Ahuachapán and left

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<sup>3</sup> *La Crónica del Pueblo* (4 June 1979).

<sup>4</sup> Paid advertisements placed by the Freedom or Slavery Patriotic Association in *La Prensa Gráfica* (3 and 4 June 1979).

threatening letters addressed to the union leaders and workers. This trade union played a decisive role in the series of strikes that took place during the month of March.

Many people have received threats through telephone calls and anonymous letters. The director of the newspaper, *La Crónica*, denounced these threats and had the courage to hold General Romero personally responsible for whatever might happen to him<sup>5</sup>.

On June 5 something horrible happened at the hospital in Usulután—you all saw it in the newspaper<sup>6</sup>. They shot to death Manuel Rodas Umaña, a prisoner who was recuperating after being wounded and arrested on February 4. He was under the jurisdiction of the courts. After committing the murder, the assassins coolly left the hospital with no one impeding their departure.

The minister of education has decried the wave of violence that has swept over the teaching profession and has also made victims of many citizens of other sectors of society.

We keep hearing that there will be an exhaustive investigation of all these crimes, but nothing goes beyond promises. Once again we want to remind people: the judicial power in our country is dormant in the midst of so many crimes and so much grief in so many homes. On other occasions the government has shown that it is capable of stopping these waves of violence of the extreme right. Now we want a serious effort to be made to put an end to the awful crimes of this sector.

But we're not going to cover up the crimes of the other extreme either. We are not in agreement with terrorist actions or with the actions of military political movements that have committed excesses. In a confrontation with the National Guard, two supposed members of the FPL and a member of the Guard were killed. Also, three members of the FARN were killed in circumstances that are still unclear. It is not known what group burned the route 125 bus on June 6. No news has been heard about the fate of the three persons for whom we have pled before, the two Englishmen and more recently Miguel Miguel. Also, on June 3 the FPL set three small planes on fire in Santa Ana, and they also torched a gasoline station in Sonsonate and the mayor's offices in San Martín and four other townships. No one knows who destroyed the treasury police post and the El Cataño factory on June 4. The murder of the Swiss chargé d'affaires also remains a mystery. We hope that steps are being taken to investigate all these cases. And I repeat: in no way can the church approve these acts of terrorism that are inspired by resentment or vengeance.

At the same time our people have received very valuable testimonies of solidarity, for which I want to give thanks here in public because they have come from many places: from France, from Venezuela, and from Costa Rica. But I also want to clarify—as we have done already in the newspapers and other media—that I have not requested any communist in Costa Rica to promote condemnation of our government<sup>7</sup>. This is a lie. I have done no such thing. What is curious is that the media that were repeating this item of news continued to publicize it even after the clarification was sent to them by the archbishop's office. It's true that the

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<sup>5</sup> *La Crónica del Pueblo* (5 June 1979).

<sup>6</sup> *El Mundo* (6 June 1979).

<sup>7</sup> *La Prensa Gráfica* (2 and 7 June 1979); *Orientación* (10 June 1979).

slander was voiced in a paid advertisement, but who paid for it? Who is interested in maligning the archbishop?

These are our people, and I want to keep them at the center of our reflection on the God who seeks to guide them along the paths of peace and holiness. He is a God «with a strong arm» who wants to correct all disorders. That is what the pope said today when he celebrated his final Mass in Poland in honor of the patron saint of that country, whom he called «the patron of the moral order»<sup>8</sup>. Our history has paid a steep price to defend the moral order because our faith can never be the cause of disorder. The God of eternal order can never desire such disorders in our country.

I want to ask all those persons who have faith in this God: let us intensify our prayer and also our commitment to this church of God's holy order so that we work together to the extent of our influence and our capabilities. Let those of you who have a political vocation also work from the sphere of politics, which is the duty of citizens. I speak especially to you lay people. Faith in God that does not translate into working to establish a more just order in the country where God has placed us is not true faith. Just as I have in my pastoral role, so all of you have the obligation to work hard in your positions, in your homes, in your country, and in whatever influence you have on government or organized groups. We all have to work in social, political, and economic areas so that this people—which has not only been chosen by God but has been baptized with his holy name, El Salvador—is truly a people in whom God lives and acts «with a strong and mighty arm».

But let us now look at another people, the people of Poland, whom the pope has been visiting during these days. Even in the worst catastrophes and under the worst regimes, the Poles have shown how the people's faith keeps hope alive. They remain united and are always ready to work hard so that God will reign. I am also very pleased to note the coincidence of what the pope said in Poland with the position of the archbishop's office in El Salvador. The pope stated: «Normal relations between church and state in Poland are linked to the cause of fundamental human rights». And the supreme pontiff went on to say, «No true dialogue can take place unless the authorities respect the convictions of believers, guarantee all the rights of citizens, and establish normal conditions for the church's activity»<sup>9</sup>. Isn't that the same as what we've been saying? We have never refused to dialogue. It seems to me that the pope is stipulating the same conditions for a fruitful dialogue that we have: there must be respect for the people, whom the church cannot abandon. The church will never leave our suffering people to fend for themselves. (Applause)

Beautiful also was the pope's prayer to the Virgin Mary, to whom the Polish people are especially devoted. He prayed, «Mother of the church, allow the church to enjoy freedom and peace as she fulfills her mission of salvation so that she may achieve a new maturity of faith and internal unity. Help us to overcome opposition and difficulties. Help us to overcome the great moral threats against the basic spheres of life and love». He then added, «Justice and

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<sup>8</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Homily in Cracow at the Jubilee Mass for Saint Stanislaus», 10 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (24 June 1979).

<sup>9</sup> JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Episcopal Conference of Poland», 5 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (17 June 1979).

peace can be protected only by respecting the rights of peoples and nations and not by means of hatred, war, and self-destruction»<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, as we consider the people of God and all those under God's guidance, I want to express my solidarity this morning—and I ask you all to do likewise—with the suffering and distress of our fellow nation of Nicaragua. The bishops there, harmonizing marvelously with the thought of the Salvadoran bishops, wrote a letter concerning the difficult situation of their people. In the letter they urge the authorities to investigate a series of events that have become routine and are contrary to civic order. The problems they list are very similar to those of El Salvador: «disappearance of persons, imprisonment without cause, onerous fines, torture, murder of innocent persons, execution of prisoners, desecration of corpses, searching of homes, hospitals, churches, and schools, arbitrary closing of radio stations, and persecution and defamation of bishops, priests, religious and laypeople»<sup>11</sup>.

The bishops go on to say, «It is painful to witness the state of insecurity and even of desperation that afflicts the Nicaraguan people. Legal subterfuge has closed off a peaceful path toward democracy, and now wholesale destruction crushes all hope for a just and civil restoration of national order. Our people have the right to forge their own destiny»<sup>12</sup>.

This is what the church wants! The church is not an opposition party. The church is a divine force inspiring the people to shape their own destiny. The church does not seek to impose political or social systems, nor should she, for that is not her job. But the church does encourage people to be free, so that they aren't subject to an oppressive authority. People should use their knowledge and their skills to create the kind of society they deserve, the kind of life they want. They should forge their own destiny and be free to choose the way to reach the destiny God wants for them.

Returning to Nicaragua, then, I hope that the declaration that Salvadoran forces will not intervene in support of that tyranny is authentic. If any intervention is to be made, it is precisely the kind the bishops of Nicaragua have stated, an intervention on behalf of the people who are freely seeking their own destiny. (Applause)

These three examples of El Salvador, Poland, and Nicaragua help us to understand what kind of faith in God people should have. In Poland the pope knows that he is dealing with an atheistic government, and in a certain sense he has more freedom to demand religious freedom for his people. But when atheistic attitudes are camouflaged by Christian hypocrisy, then it is more difficult to speak out as people have done here in Latin America and in Nicaragua and as we try to do here in El Salvador. We are not an opposition party but a church defending God, who wants people to be free. As Moses declared, God wanted freedom and dignity for Israel, a people that bore in its very flesh the memory of Egyptian slavery and the people's humiliation at the hands of slave drivers. Yet Moses invited Israel to give thanks to the compassionate God who freed them with his strong arm and generous hand. That is what we ask of the Lord: that he free us from our many difficulties and that he restore freedom and dignity to our dear people.

<sup>10</sup> «Consecration to Mary in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Czestochowa», 4 June 1979, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (10 June 1979).

<sup>11</sup> «Message to the Nicaraguan People from the Bishops' Conference of Nicaragua», 2 June 1979, in *Orientación* (17 June 1979).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

## **The God of our Lord Jesus Christ**

So now I'll be briefer in the other two considerations. We have already spent much time on the God of our fathers because he continues to be the God of El Salvador and the God of Nicaragua. He is the God that every person of good will can find and rely on. When Jesus Christ came in the fullness of time, the God of our fathers was called the «God of our Lord Jesus Christ» (2 Cor 1:3). This does not contradict what we have said before but rather brings it to perfection because the God of the old covenant was a monotheistic God. There is only one God, as Moses declared after recounting all the great works that were done: «Profess and meditate in your hearts that the Lord is the only God above in the heavens and here below on earth» (Deut 4:39). God is transcendent and infinite but is not far away; he is a God who is close, here on earth, and there is no other. That God was known imperfectly by the Israelites, who knew him as a powerful God, the God of the people, the God of the patriarchs, but Christ came to reveal God in all his perfection.

Christ appears in today's gospel declaring, «Go forth and baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit» (Matt 28:19). The God of Jesus Christ is a God who is family; he is not a solitary God. God is one and unique, but in God there are three persons: the Father begets the Son by a mysterious process of eternity, and then a current runs through the begotten Son and the begetting Father that is also a person, the Spirit of love, the Holy Spirit, who identifies and unites them. This is the trinitarian process that Christ reveals by continually telling us about the Father; he tells us, «My Father loves you» (John 14:21), and he also tells us, «I will send the Spirit» (John 16:7). This promise of the God of Jesus Christ is fulfilled when he dies to pay for our sins and when he rises and returns to heaven. When, finally, he tells the Father, «Mission accomplished», that trinitarian current, which has not been broken, extends even further: «Let us send forth the Spirit which unites us as Father and Son in eternal love. Let our Spirit be the current that also energizes the hearts of humankind». And the Holy Spirit came, sent as the force of God's life to make us all into one single family.

But let us focus on this Christ who reveals the Father to us. As we have said, he does not come to reveal to us a god of Athens or a god of the philosophers. He comes to reveal to us a living God, a God who is love. There is no need for great learning. Christ tells the apostles, «Whoever sees me sees the Father» (John 14:9). Or as Saint Paul said, «all the glory of the Father is revealed in the face of Christ, his Son» (2 Cor 4:6). This is the role of Christ, and that is why the Council calls him the fullness of revelation (DV 4). Because Christ has told us so, we know now that the Father had such great love for us that he sent his Son to die for us. All those wonderful parables of Christ are revelations of God. Remember the lost sheep that the shepherd seeks out with love (Luke 15:4-7) or the prodigal son who squanders all his fortune and returns destitute and disgraced; even then, the father embraces him and clothes him gloriously once again (Luke 15:11-31). This is the God that Christ came to reveal. The God of Jesus Christ is the God of mercy.

That is why we Christians, more than the Israelites under Moses, should give thanks, for it is not in a burning bush that we have come to know God. Christ is the burning bush of the New Testament. In Christ burns bright the fullness of God's love. Whoever knows Christ has found God. «No one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son wishes to reveal him» (Matt 11:27). How marvelous it is to have faith in Christ! But Christian faith is not a theoretical or academic faith; it is not a faith of the head. Rather it is faith in the sense of

confidence and commitment. «In you, Lord, I place all my trust; let me never be put to shame» (Ps 31:2). To believe in Christ who reveals the Father is to accept the faith that makes us truly free.

### **The Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit**

Finally, dear sisters and brothers, my third point: the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. The second reading speaks about how humanity is admitted to the family of God.

Imagine how fortunate and grateful the son of poor parents would feel if adopted by a family that offers to sponsor all his studies and do for him whatever he wants to develop his personality. But even that would be just a pallid image of what the Spirit of God does when adopting us human beings. He asks us, «Do you want to belong to the trinitarian process? Do you want to be part of the life of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, that life which is unity, communion, love, commitment, and light? Do you want that life to descend here also and bestow on you love, unity, commitment, communion, and generosity?»

Saint Paul says today, «Blessed are those who accept this invitation, who are led by the Spirit of God because they are children of God» (Rom 8:14). We have received this Spirit, but what does it produce in us? If we belong to this family of God by baptism and are living in the grace of God, then we discover the consequences in today's second reading.

«You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear» (Rom 8:15a). We must remember this whenever we experience an ambience of fear or tension. «You have not received a spirit of slavery». You have received the capacity for freedom, and therefore every struggle for freedom corresponds to the designs of God not only in Israel but in the holy ones of the New Testament.

«You received the Spirit of adoption who makes us cry: *Abba!*» (Rom 8:15b). *Abba* means «dad» or «father»; this was the Aramaic word Christ used when he prayed to the Father. Christ also taught us the Our Father (Matt 6:9). When we're in God's grace, we say that this is so because the Spirit gives testimony deep within us that «we are truly children of God» (Rom 8:16). The Spirit has adopted us and infused in us the current of divine life which exalts us not only in eternity after death but right here and now. Let us thank God that we have so many saints in our church, so many truly holy women and men, because God has included them in his trinitarian life. Many of them also work for the just causes of our people, as we all should do, but they do so from the perspective of God's life, which provides solid foundation for our ideals and our ambitions.

In closing I cite a thought of Saint Cyprian which was used by the Council. After hearing about the work of the Father and the work of the Son and the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, we should feel welcomed into the love of the Blessed Trinity for we have been invited to form part of their family. We are invited to rise up and make of earth itself an image of the heaven to which we aspire, and we should end by saying, with Cyprian, «In this way the whole church»—that is, all of us—«appears as a people brought together by virtue of the unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit» (LG 4). Let it be so. (Applause)