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## **THE FAMILY, A REVELATION OF GOD'S LOVE**

**Sunday in the Octave of Christmas  
Feast of the Holy Family  
31 December 1978**

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14

Colossians 3:12-21

Luke 2:22-40

Dear sisters and brothers and esteemed radio audience, I wish you a Happy New Year! But the church wants to give a deeper meaning to this expression that is repeated so often today. For the church this Sunday is the liturgical feast of the Holy Family, which resulted from the Second Vatican Council's desire to focus attention on the problems affecting the welfare of the human family and society. The Council stated, «The well-being of the individual person and of human and Christian society is intimately linked with the healthy condition of that community produced by marriage and family» (GS 47). In wishing you a Happy New Year as the calendar changes, my profound desire is that we all enjoy the truest source of happiness, which is found in the flourishing of the community of married couples and the family. We are all members of a family, and the family's welfare redounds to the welfare of its members. When we leave our Mass, those of us who can say, «I'm going to my home», are happy. Having a home, having a nest, is a source of joy and happiness. Jesus also had a family and wanted to begin the redemption of humankind by becoming the member of a family.

This season of Christmas extends from December 25 to the Sunday following January 6, and during this time we celebrate the great mystery of our faith which the church presents to us: God has come! God is with us! That is what «Emmanuel» means: «God with us». Christmas is the mystery of God visiting humankind, but God doesn't just come for a visit and then return home. No, he comes to stay. «The Word became flesh and dwelt among us» (John 1:14). God became incarnate, he became flesh—we've already spoken of the meaning of that word in the Bible. God became a companion of every human life; he became a member of every family; he became a child of every home. He has every right to enter and feel at home in every family. Even in the humblest of dwellings—Christ is there! He is also present in the most elegant of homes, if only the people make room for him to enter by not worshiping any false god. Wherever the door is opened to him he eagerly enters.

Now that Christmas has passed, it is fitting to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. Since God became human to save the human race, he wants also to reveal himself through the family, and so he becomes inseparable from Joseph and Mary, the family of Jesus. From the time of his birth Jesus does not appear without Mary, and he always accompanied Saint Joseph as long as Joseph was alive on earth. It seems that by the time of Jesus' public life Joseph had died, but Jesus always appeared united to his most holy mother. He had a home, he had a family. And so the theme of my homily for today, the feast of the Holy Family, will be this: «The

Family, a Revelation of God's Love». Another word for «revelation» is «epiphany», which means something like a monstrance, where God lives and can be seen. God wants to reveal himself to society, to history, to the world as one who belongs to a family. Every family that lives by Christian norms must also become epiphanies or manifestations of God and his love. A man and a woman don't get married just to be happy as a couple. They also have a tremendous social function; they should make their own conjugal love a presence in the world, and later, when children come, that family united and established in love must be an epiphany of God and a symbol of God.

Let us examine this morning this epiphany of God that is the family from the perspective of Nazareth. Shortly after Paul VI was elevated to the pontificate, he paid a visit to the Holy Land. One of his most touching visits was to the little house of Nazareth, where he preached a wonderful homily conveying the sentiment of a person who feels very much at home: «How nice it would be to be a child again and to live in the bosom of this family where we could learn the meaning of silence, of duty, of work, and of family»<sup>1</sup>. Today, with the help of the Gospel and the liturgy of the Holy Family, we also can make this same pilgrimage that Paul VI made. We can feel ourselves to be truly members of that family, children of Mary, who is the mother of Jesus and our mother. We can feel protected by the strong and steady hand of Saint Joseph in his manly tenderness. And above all, sisters and brothers, we will be companions and intimate confidants of the great brother of humankind, Jesus himself. Therefore, following my custom, I will organize my considerations into three ideas: first, the human dimension of the family; second, the religious and ecclesial transcendence of every family; and third, Christ's revealing himself to the world by living in a family.

### **The human dimension of the family**

The human dimension of the family is revealed for us in the quaint ending of today's gospel: «They returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth, and the child grew and became strong» (Luke 2:39-40). What life is more simple than that of two *campesinos* who have a child? He works to support the family; she does the household chores. The fountain is still there in Nazareth; it's the only one there, situated on the edge of town. That's where Mary would go with her jug to draw water, which she'd then mix with the flour. All those picturesque parables about women at home—Jesus was seeing them there in that simple home in Nazareth. «And the child grew and became strong».

Today's first reading is something of a synopsis of the wisdom of the Old Testament. This Scripture was possibly composed by a rabbi who had a diplomatic post in the royal courts but who later returned to the simplicity of the Bible. He wrote the famous book of Ecclesiasticus, which is a collection of homespun proverbial counsels, for example: «The father has greater authority than his children. The mother's authority rules over her offspring. Do not abandon your father as long as you live, even if his mind fails» (Sir 3:2,12-13). That means that even if your father is an old man whose mind wanders, you should respect him. Today's first reading also speaks of the great human satisfaction that comes to those who honor their fathers and their mothers: «Those who honor their father will experience joy with their own children» (Sir 3:5). Naturally, a person who is a good son or daughter will also be a good parent. «Those who respect their father will have a long life» (Sir 1:6). The Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup> PAUL VI, «Homily in the Crypt of the Annunciation in Nazareth», 5 January 1964.

knew nothing about the rewards of eternal life in God that we Christians know about, but it spoke beautifully about earthly happiness, and it found great satisfaction in the joys of this world. As you can see, simple humanity does not need a mystical dimension. The human heart emerges quite simply from human nature, urging us to infuse our family life with love and respect.

In the second reading Saint Paul also sees the human dimension of the family; he tells us, «Let yourselves be clothed with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and understanding» (Col 3:12). These are plain and simple treasures, but they are perhaps like the coins that we handle so often that they lose their image and we no longer value them. Yet how beautiful is the simple life lived in the simple humanity of the family. That's why the Council said that «the family is the school of the most precious humanism» (GS 52). When the parents of John XXIII celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of their marriage, he was an apostolic delegate in the East. From there he wrote a letter that has been preserved, in which he addressed the elderly *campesinos* with great tenderness: «I left your house a long time ago. I have studied in many schools, and I have read many books, but nowhere have I learned what I learned from you: the wisdom of the home»<sup>2</sup>—the home that is «school of the most precious humanism». We can understand why John XXIII was the man he was: he was educated in the school of his own home. The Council also stated that «various generations come together in the family» (GS 52). Just look at the scene in today's gospel: the child Jesus, the young parents Mary and Joseph, and the elderly Simeon and Anna. Doesn't this give us some idea of what a human family is? Children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, many generations flowing together. There is no room for conflict among generations when there is love.

Regarding this human dimension, dear sisters and brothers, I don't want you to be ignorant of what the bishops said about the family when they met in Medellín. (Our Latin American families need to realize that the Medellín meeting applied the Second Vatican Council to our Latin American reality.) The bishops at Medellín arrived at a beautiful synthesis regarding the family in Latin America by saying that it has three tasks: «formation of persons, education in the faith, and promotion of development» (M 3,4). It seems to me that these attributes highlight the great value of the family for our people.

«Formation of persons». When we look at the human aspect of the family, the first thing we see is that each member is a person. Before we can be Christian, we have to be quite human. Often we try to build Christianity on false ideas about what is human; perhaps that's why we have so many phony people and false Christians. The super-pious person is not a real Christian and is not really human either. Many people who claim to defend religion are not even truly human, much less Christian. I have to laugh at the way interested parties in El Salvador have become defenders of Christianity, calling themselves «authentic Catholics». By what right do they call themselves «authentic Catholics» if they are not even true human beings who know what it means to worship the true God? Instead, they are on their knees idolizing the things of earth.

«Formation of persons». The human family must form persons, personalities. Medellín explains that as follows: «The presence and influence of the distinct and complementary masculine and feminine models of the parents, the bond of mutual affection, the atmosphere of

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<sup>2</sup> MARÍN DE SAN MARTÍN L., *Juan XXIII, Retrato eclesiológico* [John XXIII: Ecclesiological Portrait], Barcelona 1998, note 11.

trust, intimacy, respect, and freedom which permeates the social framework governed by a natural hierarchy—all these elements enable the family to mold strong and balanced personalities for society» (M 3,4). My dear families, take hold of this great message of Christmas, and apply it to yourselves. How we wish that all fathers would be like Joseph! How we wish that all mothers would be like Mary! How we wish that all children would be like Jesus! How we wish that we all had the valiant personalities of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus so that we never bow before flattery or threats, and so that we say, as Jesus did, that our «bread is to do the will of the Father» (John 4:34). These are real human values.

In speaking of the family as promoter of development, the bishops declared, «The family is the school of the most precious and complete humanism, which is integral development. The family is the foundation of society, for in the family different generations come together and help one another to achieve a fuller wisdom and to learn how to harmonize the rights of persons with the other demands of social life. The children in the family, living together in a climate of love, learn more easily the correct hierarchy of things, and as they grow, the souls of the adolescents are shaped in natural ways by reliable cultural forms. The parents have the responsibility in the family of preparing their children to know the love of God» (M 3,7). «Formation of persons» implies «promotion of development». If nowadays everything has a social function in the world, then the family is of great value, dear sisters and brothers. The family will bring forth Salvadorans who are true human persons, people who can be trusted; the family will produce new women and men who will create a new world, who won't allow themselves to be dragged down by a putrid system, who refuse to bow before favors, who don't sell themselves out, who are truly above seeking their own advantage. Above all, they will have the value of being true human persons. We need families like the family of Nazareth. That is the human dimension of the family.

As Saint Paul's letter continues today, the next verses speak concretely about those family relations: «Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly. Children, obey your parents in everything, for that is pleasing to the Lord. Parents, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart» (Col 3:18-21). But the family extends further still. In Saint Paul's time there were slaves and masters, which today we could translate with other terms that mean the same thing: «Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as something done for the Lord and not for your masters, since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward» (Col 3:22-24). Paul told the slaves, «You also are heirs», but he is also telling the hired workers of today, those who now work under different masters: «You also have dignity. Serve your masters not to please them but to please the Lord. From him you receive an inheritance that will be given to you in justice because you have the very same Lord as your masters». Saint Paul concludes by saying, «Serve Christ. The wrongdoers will be paid back for their injustices, for in God there is no partiality» (Col 3:24-25). Before God the recommendation of highly placed friends will be worthless. What will count in the end is how justly each of us has treated our sisters and brothers. «Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly for you know that you also have a Master in heaven» (Col 4:1). These courageous human principles were the wedge with which Paul fractured that situation of slaves and masters. Moreover, his great principle, «In God there is no partiality», will always be a wedge that obliterates all injustices and all disorders. Masters, you also have a Lord to whom you must render accounts. Slaves, obey and don't rebel just for the sake of rebellion. We all have a judge

who demands of us social justice. This is the human dimension of family relations and labor relations and all that has to do with human groups.

### **The religious and ecclesial transcendence of the family**

Now we will focus on another aspect that in a certain sense is of more interest for our reflection: the religious and ecclesial dimension of the family.

Let us contemplate the beautiful scene of Christ in the arms of his mother, who in turn is protected by her husband as they all travel to the temple to fulfill a customary rite. Every woman who gave birth had to be purified ritually, and the rite of purification included the redemption of the firstborn. When the firstborn son was brought to the temple, the parents had to make an offering in the child's name as a holocaust to be offered to God. When the family was poor, the offering was two pigeons or doves; one was sacrificed as an offering for sins, and the other was sacrificed in thanksgiving. That was what Jesus' poor family offered: two pigeons. In such rites the Lord receives homage from the family because the family has a religious significance.

You no doubt noticed that in today's first reading the relations of fathers and mothers with their children and the relations of children with their parents are not simply a command. Rather, a reason is always given: «so that the Lord will pardon you your sins», «so that the Lord will hear your prayer», «so that the Lord will bless you» (Sir 3:3-6). The reason indicates that in the home there is true worship of God. The religious gesture of Mary and Joseph in making the offering commanded by Moses is similar to what is happening in all our homes every day and at every hour. When a son obeys, above all a grown son, he is truly admirable; he is a man obeying another man because he is «my dad»—or he is a man obeying a woman because she is «my mom». Those words have a sacred sound on human lips; they possess almost divine authority. Even if the father is perhaps just a simple *campesino* and his son an educated professional, yet the professional man venerates and respects his father. It is a form of worship. The young man knows more than his *campesino* father, but he also knows that the father's authority comes from God, just as the father knows that the son also has a life given to him by God. There is, then, mutual respect, religious meaning, worship.

The husband who is faithful to his wife and unwilling to betray her is a good member of the family. Being unfaithful to her would be an almost sacrilegious act because it would betray the fidelity that is owed not to a woman but to God. Thus, family relations take on a beautiful significance that is explained by the Council in the following words: «Founded by God, the conjugal partnership is a community of life and of love; it arises in society from a human act in which the spouses give of themselves and receive one another» (GS 48). That is what matrimony is: giving of self. The spouses declare, «As your husband, I give myself to you and promise to be faithful to you». «As your wife, I receive you and give myself to you». Giving of themselves and receiving each other is something so holy that only God, who is the author of life, can allow it and bless it.

In this way the union of two spouses becomes an institution confirmed by divine law. «What God has joined together no human being can separate» (Matt 19:6). Therefore, that union, blessed by God and endowed with profound religious meaning, can not simply invent laws to its liking and have relations as it sees fit. Neither can any state authority impose

conditions or promote situations of sin. This is something I would like to state with all the eloquence of which I am capable. In our country the law of God is being violated when people are given means that frustrate the laws of fertility, when clinics are being established, and when mutilation and castration are inflicted in the government's name. By what right does this happen? Only God has rights in these matters! By what right does a married couple decide to get sterilized or to use contraceptives, since that is only God's concern? Marriage is a bond that God has established and sanctioned. We should never do the bidding of foreign governments just to receive subsidies if they're going to require us to perform mutilations that are contrary to the law of the Lord. The law of God is not to be mocked. All these offenses against the laws of fertility will cause us dire consequences, like those that are already being felt elsewhere. It is said that in the United States they no longer sell pills, but still they send them to Latin America so that the women here will be ruined!

It is God's law that regulates the union of man and woman. The instinct that God has given us in male and female sexuality is not something to play with just for mutual pleasure, as if it were a simple diversion and our homes were bordellos. What we need above all is responsible fatherhood. That means that the man realizes that he has the capacity to make children and he must use this gift responsibly. Likewise, the woman knows that she can become pregnant and so must be responsible. They must not act contrary to the laws of nature but rather live in conformity with the laws of the Creator.

Dear sisters and brothers, this week while celebrating the feast of the Holy Innocents in Antiguo Cuscatlán, I had the thought: so many innocents have died as a result of the abortion laws, children who were already alive in their mother's womb! The sources of life are cut off. The conjugal union and the family are meant to be a mirror of God's law; they are meant to reflect God's kindness and fecundity so that the children born of that union feel truly embraced in love and not rejected as troublesome rubbish. Let this feast of the Holy Family move us to be genuinely loving because we are speaking of a true institution of love. May our families make themselves worthy of that love and reflect it all over the earth.

Today's reading also shows the family in its ecclesial dimension. What do I mean by this? I mean that the family, as Saint Paul envisions it generally in his letter to the Colossians, is a cell of the great society which is the people of God. With magnificent eloquence Paul today addresses the Christian Colossians: «Chosen people of God! People holy and beloved!» (Col 3:12). This is the blessed people that is born of the family! If the church is a family of God that has its source in family groups, then the family according to Christian law is not simply a moral, human relation; it is a deeply Christian relation. In the paragraph of this letter where Saint Paul speaks of the community of the church and the community of the family, the phrase «in the Lord» is repeated many times. «Be mutually faithful in the Lord». «Children, be respectful in the Lord». (Col 3:18,20). That means that we have to view family relations in the light of the church. It's what the Council also calls «the domestic church», in which the father and the mother are the first priests who preach the word of God to their children and in turn receive from their children a testimony of innocence and holiness. When the family is viewed this way, as a domestic church—in Latin the word is *ecclesiola*, little *ecclesia*, «little church»—then the home is a church, but it is one where there are no cardinals or Roman pontiffs (none of that exists) but only mom, dad, and children. And from that embryo is born the great universal church because in Christ all are baptized and belong to the people of God. From this perspective, the Spirit of Christ has been given to mom, dad, and children so that they no longer

are owners of themselves. They are a cell belonging to the great family which is the church, and in Christ Jesus they are to find their norms for living.

In this regard Medellín refers to the special difficulties of Latin America, since the meeting was held for that purpose: «We know that many families in Latin America have been incapable of educating in the faith because they are not stable or because they have disintegrated; others have been incapable because they imparted this education in purely traditional terms, at times with mythical and superstitious aspects. From this situation springs the necessity of providing today's families with the elements they need to rebuild their evangelizing capacity in accord with the doctrine of the church» (M 3,6). I believe that many of our own family situations are reflected in these words, and I say this with sorrow, dear sisters and brothers, not to offend anyone. If we take a good look at the evil that surrounds us, we should have the courage to be like a young orphan I know who was abandoned by her parents. When she was of an age to be married, she told me, «I take good care of myself because I want to give my children what my parents couldn't give me». That is how a new humanity will spring forth! Honestly, I don't say this to be offensive. I say it because I would like my country to have family cells that are healthier and that are truly ecclesial. I say this also because I see from the church's perspective the huge deficiencies in our traditional Christianity that were pointed out in Medellín, such as old superstitious customs, but there is also the scandal taken at the truth preached by the church. And when people have money, they will even publicize those scandals as if they were defending true values. They don't realize that they are defending what is indefensible: lies, falsehoods, a lifeless traditionalism, and even worse, certain economic interests which, unfortunately, the church once served. But that was a sin of the church, deceiving people and not telling the truth when the truth needed to be spoken.

Today we also want to tell you, dear sisters and brothers, that some of you are perhaps deceived. The truth is here in this Christian faith that worships God and gives earthly things their relative, not absolute, values. The children born to you should be educated not in poisoned traditions but in the pure truth that flows from the Gospel, the truth that I sincerely try to impart. Do not disfigure my words. Do not disfigure my sincere desire to show you the vitality of Christianity as I believe the church has been presenting it since the Second Vatican Council and the reflections of Medellín. Both these meetings recovered the basic meaning of our faith, which had been twisted and needed to be straightened out. Let us all work together toward this same end as sisters and brothers!

I have a letter here at hand but don't have time to read it. It's from a Colombian who returned to his native land; he writes, «Greetings. I leave this letter to be delivered by a friend because I'm leaving here. This greeting is from an ex-Catholic who no longer believes in the church, but I'm sorry to be leaving now when it really is worthwhile being a Catholic. Pray for me so that the faith that you proclaim and that this people believe in might fill me in a way that the faith they gave me before never did». Dear sisters and brothers, that's why there is no formation in faith in some families: parents are teaching traditions that have been poisoned by economic and political interests that are all mixed up with matters of faith. They want a form of religion that simply protects their interests, but when the church criticizes those kinds of selfish sins and abuses, they decide to leave the church and go off with their children to practice traditions that are not truly Christian.

Our families need to impart formation in the faith; they must sincerely respond to the young people who have different kinds of concerns. Not long ago I met with some youngsters, and they told me, «You don't understand how difficult our situation is. Our parents tell us not to meet together because it's very dangerous. "Why cause yourselves problems?" they tell us». I told them, «No, you shouldn't cause yourselves problems, but you should study the faith that God asks of you. You should be sincere and respectable youngsters. And if you find that the Christian religion is true, be courageous enough to say, "I will follow it no matter what". Or better still: "I'm unable to follow it, but I don't want to fool people by following it halfheartedly"». This is the ecclesial dimension of the family.

### **Jesus is alive and reveals himself to the world in the family**

Our church has a religious and ecclesial dimension because she has in her heart the One who is all in all: Christ our Lord, who is alive and reveals himself in the family. How wonderful it would be if all families today experienced Christ living in their midst! Christ is in the smallness of that little child; he is in the restlessness of youth; he is in the holy preoccupations of that father and that mother; he is in the venerable old age of that grandma or granddad. That's where Christ is to be found because that's how he appears in today's gospel. He is the same redeeming Christ who wanted to be the member of a family. He is the same Christ who needs our world and our history but who wants to become incarnate in particular families. This is the Christ who revealed himself to Simeon and Anna.

Simeon was awaiting the consolation of Israel and knew that he wasn't going to die before seeing Christ. When he finally saw him, he took him in his hands and pronounced that beautiful prophecy, as if he were a sentinel on watch. Remember how, when Advent began, I told you that we had to keep an attitude of watchfulness? Here Simeon appears as a watchman, tired after the long night. As he prepares to depart from life, he prays, «Lord, now you can dismiss your servant in peace for my eyes have seen the salvation of Israel. This child is the light of the nations and the salvation of all peoples» (Luke 2:29-32). Then, turning to Joseph and Mary, he tells them, «This child is a sign of contradiction. Good people and bad people who repent will find in him mercy and will receive pardon. But many will also be lost because their selfishness, sinfulness, and pride will make them reject him» (Luke 2:34). Christ is a stumbling block! That's why I feel a tremendous honor is done me when people reject me, because then I appear a bit more like Jesus Christ who also was a stumbling block. Simeon prophesied that the church, in following Christ, would have to be like Christ himself, and for some that will be salvation. How wonderful it was to hear the words in that letter: «Before I didn't believe in the church, but now I'm beginning to believe!» I experience joy, sisters and brothers, at many conversions I see, just as I also experience the painful obstinacy of many who reject Christ. But really, they are like those hypocritical Pharisees who rejected Christ not for any lack of clarity in his words, for he spoke to them plainly. It was rather the malice of their hearts that darkened their sight so that they couldn't see anything good in the Lord. This is Christ, the sign of contradiction.

The aged holy man says to Mary, «Because of this child a sword will pierce your heart» (Luke 2:35). What would you say, dear mothers—especially those of you who are young? What would you say if, when you brought your child to be baptized, a prophet were to tell you, «This child is going to have a tragic end»? You would not live in peace. You'd always be asking, «When will this terrible hour come?» That was how Mary lived, awaiting the hour when the

prophecy would come to pass and a sword would pierce her heart. Some people say that the sword might have been the great humility of a person like Mary: she felt herself so small in the face of the greatness of her vocation that she imagined God had made a mistake. «Why did you choose me, Lord?» And certainly Mary must have felt tiny in the face of the greatness of the call to collaborate in the redemption. Here she was, face to face with the mystery of the salvation of humankind! She truly understood the meaning of the sword at the foot of the cross, when she felt not one but, as tradition says, seven swords piercing her heart as she beheld the suffering of her son.

Anna, the venerable octogenarian, was also there, so you can see: persons of all ages are good for announcing Christ! There was Anna, declaring the presence of the Messiah to all who were looking for the liberation of Israel (Luke 2:36-38). I can just see her now, emerging from the cathedral, that little old lady who saw Christ entering in the arms of the Virgin. She is telling everybody she sees, «The Redeemer has finally come!», and all those who hear her are filled with joy. How I wish that we were all prophets in this sense of announcing the Lord's coming!

## **Life of the church**

Christ is a sign of contradiction, and history repeats itself. Don't forget, in these Sunday homilies here in the cathedral we bring into focus the light that comes from the Gospel, the Bible, the liturgy. My main concern is to be a catechist, to teach religion, and I feel satisfied that I am doing that. But then comes the time to illuminate our own reality with that doctrine. This reality is not the most important thing, but it is the setting within which this doctrine is lived. In order for us to understand, then, that this doctrine has immediate relevance for this day in 1978 in El Salvador, I now make reference to the concrete reality of our weekly history. Here and now the prophecy of Christ as a sign of contradiction is being fulfilled, and we as the people of God are still being called to be Christ's holy family, even while others do not want to pay heed to this call.

In today's *Orientación* you can read a summary of the pope's message for tomorrow, the World Day of Peace<sup>3</sup>. As they did last year, the Commission of Justice and Peace in El Salvador is preparing a celebration, which cannot take place tomorrow but is planned for the first days of January. The pope's message is excellent; you can read it there in *Orientación*. Also, the article I write every week refers to the Holy Father's message<sup>4</sup>. The pope proposes that the slogan left to us by Paul VI of happy memory be used during the coming year as the slogan for celebrating peace: «To achieve peace, we must educate for peace!» He also proposes some pedagogical norms for educating people on the subject of peace. We would do well to read his message and try to put into practice some exercises of peace during this coming year. We may not be responsible for the peace of the entire world, but we *are* responsible for peace in our homes and for peace in our society. As Saint Francis of Assisi said, we can be «instruments of peace».

I want to express my solidarity with Bishop Rivera of Santiago de María. His diocese was subject to a police raid during which the Escuela del Castaño was searched by National Guard agents who were looking for arms. The bishop has protested to the defense ministry because

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<sup>3</sup> *Orientación* (31 December 1978).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

this school is dedicated not to weapons training but to promoting the human dignity of the *campesinos* who participate in the courses that are organized there.

I also received a letter from the archbishop of Managua acknowledging the receipt of another two thousand *colones* that were sent to him, thanks to the generosity of all of you.

I want to ask your prayers for the mission now being carried out in Argentina and Chile by the pope's envoy, Cardinal Samoré. As you know, those two nations are in conflict and have asked for the intervention of the pope, who as a first step has sent the cardinal to investigate the situation.

Also, sisters and brothers, Puebla is about to begin. Tomorrow is the first of January, and on January 27 the General Assembly of Latin American Bishops will be inaugurated in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, with the pope presiding. I will have the good fortune of participating in the meeting and therefore of representing all of you there. There has been some question as to whether I will be attending with voice and vote or just with voice. Those bishops who attend are representing all the hierarchy<sup>5</sup>. I'm not sure what interests are at stake here, but I want to tell you clearly that I will be present at Puebla as a member of the Pontifical Commission of Latin America. It's as though the pope himself had called me to be an advisor to this meeting of the Latin American bishops. Some people publish these speculations with the unwholesome desire to create rivalries, but they should realize that we are proof against ambition, for our Lord forbade it in the Gospel that time when the apostles were arguing about «who was greater» (Mark 9:34). It's as if the bishops of El Salvador were feuding about «Who is greater? Who goes with voice? Who goes with voice and vote?» When the disciples were arguing, Christ told them, «Don't be like that; be straightforward. People of the world argue about such things. Among yourselves, let those who are greater become rather like little ones». (Applause) Those people also get angry because you applaud me! Many thanks! (Applause)

My main interest, dear sisters and brothers, is to go to Puebla and to use my voice—even if it is without vote—to give expression to this lively church that includes all of you, this martyred church that is so full of the Holy Spirit. And I want to tell my brother bishops that I am grateful to God because my humble voice in Puebla will allow the voice of all these communities to be heard. I want to tell them also that I am going there to learn. The experience of so many brother bishops scattered all over America will provide for me rich lessons on how to serve my own beloved diocese better. That's why I'm going to Puebla. Now that I know that the pope is coming, I'll be happy if I can do no more than make contact, take the pope's hand in mine, and tell him, «Holy Father, I am with you. I affirm my unshakable solidarity with the Holy See!» This is the whole meaning of Puebla for me. Meanwhile, dear sisters and brothers, let us keep working to build a church by following the inspiration of the Spirit of God and the light of the Gospel.

Now I want to give you some sad news, but it also has something of paschal joy in it. As you know, our dear brother, Father Rogelio Ponseele, the pastor of Zacamil, came from Belgium to work with us, and he has been with us many years. He has shared with us much of his life, his enthusiasm, and his pastoral experience. He just recently received the sad news of his dear mother's death. He wasn't able to go to her funeral, but I urge you pray to pray for her. No doubt his mother is already experiencing paschal joy for she was a great Christian who was

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<sup>5</sup> *El Diario de Hoy* (30 December 1978).

willing to let her son leave for this difficult work and forego the consolation of having him close by her. May this paschal joy also be the greatest consolation for Father Rogelio in his loss. In fraternal solidarity, therefore, I send him the condolences and the prayers of all the beloved archdiocese, especially the vicariate of Mejicanos, where we will soon celebrate a Mass for his mother.

We continue to visit the communities, sisters and brothers, and let me repeat what I said before: the church is alive everywhere! In the Colonia Amatepec they have a new chapel, and the community there is outstanding for its enthusiasm. Palm Sunday was wonderful: with palms in their hands, both young and old came out to meet me and take me to bless the chapel. I congratulate Father José Luis, and I thank him for all that he is doing for us. Last Sunday afternoon I was in the Colonial Bernal, which is under the direction of the Augustinian Fathers since it forms part of Presentation parish in Miralvalle. I believe that this community in Bernal, with all its youthful enthusiasm, is being called to give new life to that parish. That is the place where we go traditionally to venerate the historical image of the Presentation, the very first image of Mary to be venerated here in El Salvador. It was saved from the fire in the church of San José.

On the twenty-fifth I celebrated what might be called a «sacramental Christmas» because, thanks to the impulse of the pastoral letter on sacraments, people are everywhere preparing for the sacraments more conscientiously. In Soyapango there were first communions and matrimony, and in Huizúcar in the afternoon there was an impressive parade of forty couples getting married and a good number of first communions.

On the twenty-sixth some children from the communities of Chalatenango came to visit me; they have formed a kind of solidarity committee. It's impressive to see these little ones talking about solidarity with sisters and brothers they don't even know except that, like them, they're orphaned. These are the children who won't feel the affection of their dads this Christmas because the dads are in prison or they've been killed or disappeared. During the visit the children told me something that impressed me greatly: «When we're near you, we feel that you are our dad». (Applause) I said no, that can't be because of my human limitations, but I also said yes, because they should feel the immense love of the church and know that they are not orphans, for the entire church shields them and reaches out to those who suffer.

On the twenty-seventh, the day of Saint John the Evangelist, we celebrated the patronal feast in San Juan Opico. There we warmly greeted Monsignor José María Dueñas, the vicar general of Santiago de María and a native of Opico. He was ordained a priest there fifty years ago by his uncle, Bishop Dueñas of San Miguel. With affection we recalled this unforgettable bishop as well another related bishop, my dear friend and brother, Bishop Valladares. Afterwards we had a meeting with the catechists, which gave me a good indication of the vitality of that parish. In the Basilica of the Sacred Heart we conferred the diaconate on Jaime Paredes, a young man who has just finished his studies. We want him to be a priest soon and to be a good priest!

On the feast of the Holy Innocents in Antiguo Cuscatlán there was the customary procession of children. We celebrated Mass and preached a message of respect for life and of solidarity with Jesus like that of the Innocents. Our merit comes from Christ alone, and those

children are glorious in heaven not by their personal merits but by their solidarity with Christ the Redeemer.

The twenty-eighth marked thirty days since the death of Father Ernesto Barrera and the fellow workers who died with him. We had hours of reflection and celebrated Mass with the workers. I repeated to the workers that the church will not abandon them. The church will continue to do everything possible to bring a message that is authentically priestly and ecclesial to the workers, who are a class that deserves all our respect and affection.

There was a meeting of the priests' cooperative in the seminary, where we truly felt a sense of unity and fraternity. Yesterday in San Antonio Abad the community of young people held a celebration. It was encouraging to hear more than sixty youths giving reports about their pastoral work and discussing their own concerns, which are typical of these times. In the Colegio de Belén they celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the founder of the congregation, Mother Clarita Quiroz; the Carmelites of Saint Joseph paid special homage to their foundational charism. In Santa Tecla we had a meeting with the priests, religious, and laity of the vicariate to discuss many project for the new year.

Now some announcements. This evening at seven o'clock we'll have Mass here in the cathedral to thank God for the benefits received during the year, to ask him to pardon our offenses, and to pray for strength for the new year. I also want to invite you to attend the eucharistic adoration being held all day today until ten tonight; it's at the Divina Providencia Hospital. We'll also have a celebration there at ten o'clock to give thanks to God and to make reparation to the Lord.

On Thursday of this week, the fourth, we will be in the district of La Junta in the parish of Concepción, Quezaltepeque, where we'll make an act of atonement for the robbery of the Blessed Sacrament. Next Sunday at five in the afternoon in Mejicanos there'll be the ceremony of change of pastors. Holy Family parish in the Colonia Centroamérica will have their patronal feast at six o'clock in the evening.

Another notice, one very sad for me personally, is a telegram announcing the death of a great friend from Alegría, Ricardo Hernández. If you knew his story, you'd be deeply moved. He spent thirty years in bed, paralyzed, each day worse than the one before. But he was always optimistic and had a lucid mind. Even though blind, he managed the affairs of his own little farm, and he always was ready to offer his suffering up for anyone who asked it of him. He gave me great personal consolation when I was bishop of Santiago de María. When I went to ask for his prayers, he always said, «I am always praying for you». May the Lord, then, grant him eternal rest, and may his family be blessed with the consolation of having had a saint in their home for thirty years.

## **Events of the week**

This week you'll all be interested also in news at the national level. Another person has been kidnapped, Doctor Manuel Antonio Bonilla<sup>6</sup>. For him we make the same pleas as always: that he recover his freedom and that his life be respected. We want his family to know that the

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<sup>6</sup> Kidnapped on 28 December 1978, he was the son of J. Antonio Bonilla, owner of the Teleférico San Jacinto. *El Diario de Hoy* (29 December 1978).

church is in solidarity with their sufferings and is issuing this call on his behalf so that tranquility will be restored to their home.

I can happily communicate to you that last night at ten o'clock we heard on a Netherlands radio broadcast the conditions the FARN have laid down. The fourth proclamation that the FARN wanted announced in this country was never publicized, but it was broadcast on a Latin American report in Holland, and it could be heard with perfect clarity. Within a few minutes I received a phone call informing me that Mr. Schuitema, the kidnapped Dutch man, was now free. Let us thank God, then, that he has recovered his freedom.

On the other hand, the problem of the two Englishmen<sup>7</sup> and the Japanese gentleman<sup>8</sup> remains unchanged. Regarding the Englishmen, yesterday at noon you heard on the radio that the request of the Human Rights Commission has been accepted so that the time for negotiations will be prolonged. A request was made for the participation of the archbishop in the Commission on Human Rights. The Commission has requested my consent, and I have gladly given my collaboration. I am always ready to serve the cause of freedom, life, and human rights along with the other members, Doctor Roberto Lara Velado, Doctor José Napoleón González (director of *La Crónica*), Doctor Julio César Oliva, and Doctor Fernando Augusto Méndez. We offer our services not only for the freedom of the two Englishmen but also for that of the other two kidnapped persons. Likewise, we offer our services for the freedom of all those who are suffering unjust imprisonment. For my part, I make a plea that there be flexibility in the negotiations. Human lives are in danger. Let us hope that those responsible for this situation will soon reach agreements that will bring peace and comfort to these families, because the commission can do no more than offer mediation as a way of helping the parties involved in these matters.

I want to tell everyone that these conditions of violence do nothing but affirm the proposals and the ideals that I set out in my pastoral letter. The intransigence of the current situation gives tragic relevance to the teaching of the letter, which states, «The government should use its moral and coercive power to guarantee a truly democratic state which is based on a just economic order and defends justice, peace, and the full exercise of the fundamental rights of all citizens». And here the letter quotes from the *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper of the Holy See: «The government should make ever more hypothetical and unreal the case in which recourse to violence on the part of individuals or groups can be justified by the existence of a tyrannical regime in which the laws, the institutions, and the government, instead of recognizing and promoting basic liberties and other human rights, tramples on them, thus reducing citizen to conditions of oppression»<sup>9</sup>. In other words, *L'Osservatore Romano* is saying that if unjust violence is inflicted on innocent and defenseless people, such as is the case with the kidnapped men, then the government has to examine the causes and eliminate the justifications. How long is it that we have been asking for amnesty and freedom for political prisoners? Right now I have the petition of some prisoners at Gotera who are without medical assistance. These are not common criminals; they are political prisoners who are in a detached section of the Gotera prison, where they experience true isolation. There is also a doctor imprisoned there who was just finishing his medical studies, and the other day,

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Cameron Massie and Michael Chatterton, kidnapped on 30 November 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Takakazu Suzuki, kidnapped on 7 December 1978.

<sup>9</sup> *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978) 48-49. The citation in the letter is from an article published in *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 June 1978) under the title *Lo stato democratico e la violanza*.

when a friend went to see him and asked him what he needed, imagine what he requested—a straw mat! For a prisoner there a straw mat is everything: a place to eat, to sleep, to sit. He didn't even have a mat! So it's necessary to clarify the situation of these prisoners who perhaps still haven't even gone before the courts; there should be no prisoners who are asked about and whose existence is denied. We truly want to remove the pretexts that are being used by all those who have created this situation of institutionalized violence in the country, for that is what provides the nourishment on which other kinds of violence feed. Returning, then, to the case of our kidnapped brothers, we hope that they, along with the political prisoners and all the disappeared, find some good news for their families.

I also want to deplore the death threats made against a dear friend, Doctor Roberto Lara Velado. He is very well known; you heard him speak here earlier on Human Rights Day. As a member of the Human Rights Commission, he has worked for the release of kidnap victims both in the previous commission and in the present one. It's just not right that someone who is working on behalf of the disappeared should be compensated with this kind of threat. Where are they coming from? This kind of game has to stop because we are experiencing a psychology of terror through telephone calls and warnings and rumors that do nothing but cause anxiety and turmoil.

Other denunciations in the labor field continually arrive. The unions denounce a case where workers have not been paid their bonuses. Many other cases involve workers in the coffee harvest. These problems are denounced weekly in the radio program, «The X in the Harvest», every Thursday afternoon at five-thirty.

One final word about the problem of the university. We show our solidarity, and we hope that truly just measures will be sought with the participation of all. If the lack of student participation is a stumbling block, then a reasonable way should be found for the students to participate.

We also express our solidarity with Guatemala where attacks against *campesinos* have been denounced in the villages of El Rodeo, Amatillo, Agua Blanca, El Camalote, Tunonó, Carrizalito, and still others in the municipalities of Olopa and Chiquimula.

This is the panorama in which we find ourselves at year's end on this feast of the Holy Family. Despite all the problems, a bright light stands out: the peace of Nazareth, the tranquility of that family. For all of us who live amidst this earthly turmoil, they are a mirror, a source of inspiration, a goal for us to strive for—not because they live far removed from our problems; rather, they are right there in the middle of the great problems of the world. That is why we have faith and hope in the Christian values of Christ and his Holy Family. Let it be so.

(Applause)