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CHRIST'S KINGDOM WILL HAVE NO END

Feast of Christ the King

26 November 1978

Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17

1 Corinthians 15:20-26a, 28

Matthew 25:31-46

Dear sisters and brothers, we are at the end of the liturgical year, and this last Sunday of the year is dedicated to Christ the King. This feast was previously celebrated on the last Sunday in October, but now it has been more logically placed as a beautiful crown on the whole church year.

The mystery of Christ began unfolding for us last year in Advent as we prepared to receive the Divine Child. On the feast of the Epiphany that Divine Child was presented to us in the adoration by the magi. He then grew to the age when he was a man and ready to shoulder the cross. Lent summoned all our humanity to feel solidarity with him and so to be redeemed. He died on the cross and rose up. Then, for fifty days of our liturgical calendar, the Easter season was a brilliant sun illuminating all the church's liturgy. When we come to Mass each Sunday, we are celebrating a little Easter. Every Sunday is Easter because every Sunday we encounter the eternal living One. Jesus told his disciples that it was better for him to go because his physical presence in the world could be a hindrance (John 16:7). He ascended to be seated at the right hand of the Father—a biblical expression that indicates his sharing in the power and the glory of God—and from there he sends his Spirit. We then celebrated Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit of redemption, the Spirit of repentance for sin. This is the heroic Spirit of martyrs and Christians, of religious and priests, of all the chosen people of God nourished by God's Spirit. This is the presence of the living, risen Christ who announces hope for humankind. And this long string of Sundays culminates now in this final Sunday. That great mystery of Christ, which runs through the whole year, is summed up and highlighted today in a glorious figure that is rightly called Christ the King.

What is marvelous is that this Christ, the immortal King of the ages, lives today in the concrete history of each and every people. I was happy to find that idea of Christ being incarnate in our days expressed clearly in the homily the pope gave when he took possession of the Lateran and presented himself as the bishop of Rome. The pope recalled the long history of Rome going back to the origins of Christianity; he recalled the origins of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, dedicated to Saint John the Precursor. He made the point that all these ancient historical and biblical realities are not museum pieces; they are something alive. The bishop of Rome sets himself within that ancient tradition but as a man of today. He stated, «It is in the context of this marvelous encounter of the ancient and the new that I want to begin my ministry as the new bishop of Rome. I am here to serve the people of God of this city and this diocese, which through the mission of Peter has become the first among the many sister

dioceses in the great family of the church»¹. The pope spoke about the realities that he experiences as a man living in 1978 even while being part of a history that goes back centuries to Saint John the Baptist. «In these days», he said, «I've been following with gratitude many events that television has brought close to me». Mind you, John the Baptist and Peter of Galilee didn't have television. The new pope does indeed watch television, but the spirit of Peter and John and the other ancient prophets can still be found in this man who watches television in order to see the historical events of each day and week. The pope went on to say, «I have seen that because hospitals are short of staff, many people, both adults and especially young people, have generously offered to volunteer to serve the sick». (This was one event he experienced that week.) «Since the pursuit of justice is of much value in professional life, social love should be all the more attentive. I therefore desire for my new diocese, for Rome, the same love that Christ desired for his disciples. Love and only love builds us up!»²

There is great satisfaction for me and for our dear diocese in seeing this harmony between the pope's words and what I have tried to be in my small way. I also feel connected to my predecessors, Archbishop Chávez, Archbishop Bellosio, and Archbishop Pérez y Aguilar. I don't need anyone comparing me to them and asking whether they were better than I am. What I need are people who can help me to live this present moment. The church is not memories; we are not just looking in a rearview mirror. The church is moving forward and needs new perspectives. Let us be thankful that the whole of our tradition has brought us to this moment in which there are people of great faith. Blessed be our predecessors! But we still need to be men and women of the present moment; we need to reflect on what happens each week and each moment. The problem is that many people are not interested in having anyone touch the wounds; they don't want to take a hard look at the present. They prefer to visit museums and cultivate memories and compare us with previous bishops. Well, the pope is talking about his own present moment, and I want to talk to you each week about the moment we happen to be living in.

Life of the church

Therefore, dear sisters and brothers, in this final week of the liturgical year I cannot forget about the present reality. This feast of Christ the King brings back beautiful memories of priesthood. Many priests were ordained on the feast of Christ the King when it was the last Sunday of October, before it changed to this Sunday. Just yesterday I spoke with a young Salesian who told me, «Three of us were ordained on the feast of Christ the King: Héctor Joaquín Mejía, German Escamilla, and Napoleón Mejía».

We could also speak here about the many memories of Christ the King among our people, in our communities, and in the organizations of those who love the Lord. This week I want to call to mind and thank God for the women and men in religious life. I spoke just now about the Salesians because this week they have come here in great numbers from all Central America and are meeting in Ayagualo. I send them greetings and thank them for all the good that they do for our people. May the spirit of Don Bosco continue to work much good among our young people and our families!

¹ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily in the Basilica of St John Lateran», 12 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (19 November 1978).

² Ibid.

I also had the pleasure of greeting the mother general of the Passionist Sisters, who minister here in the Divina Providencia school and in the Santa Gema school in Santiago de María. The sisters also help us in direct pastoral ministry in the town of San José Villanueva, where today the people should be celebrating their patronal feast but, since they were victims of a sacrilegious robbery, the celebration has been suspended. Instead, the sisters and the parish priest have taken a pastoral approach and have organized acts of reparation and protest because this robbery seems to be something more than simple theft³.

I also take great joy in you lay people. Last Sunday we had a big gathering of representatives of the laity, and I told them that you lay people are the greatest thing in the church. You are not priests or religious but are enmeshed in the world in marriage, in professions, in business, in the markets, in the wages of every day. You are the ones carrying the world forward, and the sanctification of the world according to God depends on you. We thank God that the spirit of lay sanctity is becoming day by day more vivid in the consciousness of our lay people.

Also in this world of the laity, we send greetings to the national meeting of the Cursillo movement that is taking place in Guatemala. A large representation from our archdiocese carried my message to that meeting of the Cursillos of Christianity. We told them that we don't want from them methodologies or spiritualities that are disincarnate and alienating. What we want from them instead is that marvelous methodology for promoting Christianity that is called Cursillos of Christianity. We want them to shape the truly new men and women that the Latin American continent needs in order for our society to be transformed from paganism to Christianity. We desire them success in their meeting, which brings together cursillistas not only from Guatemala but from all the other countries of Central America.

In this regard I also announce to you that starting now, Sunday the seventeenth of December, the laity are planning a meeting of lay movements and ecclesial base communities. I urge all those who do not belong to movements or base communities to get to know them and experience them because that is the way Christians should live: in a Christian community of friends.

When I was visiting the communities this week, I carried the filial greetings of the archdiocese to the Queen of Peace on Monday the twentieth. I wanted to celebrate an intimate private Mass at the feet of the Virgin and was accompanied by Bishop Rivera. As bishops representing two dioceses, we think we paid sincere homage to this Virgin who is patroness of El Salvador.

Last Sunday I was in Chiltiupán, and I want to congratulate the Dominican Sisters and Father Benjamín Rodríguez there for their work. I don't think many of you know that place, but it is very picturesque; it has a wonderful view of the ocean horizon. But Chiltiupán is even more beautiful for the religious devotion and the community spirit that the pastoral workers are promoting there.

I also took part in the pastoral projects and studies of the vicariate of Soyapango, and yesterday I felt inner joy as I confirmed the youth in María Auxiliadora, a village in the parish of Tenancingo. I want to point out to you how sensible these young people are. When I arrived,

³ *Orientación* (26 November 1978).

one girl told me in her speech, «Please allow us children and youth to greet you as a good friend». I told them, «You could not have spoken a more beautiful word. I want to be your friend, and I am grieved that in these parts there are people who are poisoning souls by sowing false ideas and defaming the bishop». They told me, «We listen to your homilies, and in preparing for your visit we have offered several spiritual bouquets such as work and acts of obedience». Another joy, one of those that touches deep in the heart, was the letter sent to me by the children of the village of El Rosario in Dulce Nombre de María; they wanted to tell me that their teacher, who had been arrested, was now free. Their letter says, «Blessed be God that our teacher was set free and we could do our final exams. We asked the religious sisters to help us give thanks to God».

In the parish of San Marcos, this afternoon at five o'clock, we will have a magnificent ceremony of confirmation for young people.

But I want to speak not only about pleasant matters but also about unpleasant. You all know about the confusion in the church of El Rosario with the musicians of the Symphonic Orchestra⁴. I believe it was all due to a lack of communication. The person responsible for organizing such events ought to be more informed so that at the moment of celebration there won't be confusion or neglect regarding something of great importance. In any case, on behalf of the church I want to ask our dear philharmonic friends to pardon us for this lack of communication.

There is more sad news. I already mentioned what happened in San José Villanueva. There was a sacrilegious robbery also in Talnique—I mean Tamanique. Also, the pastor of Panchimalco told me about an earlier robbery there; he had not informed me before in order to save me more worries. I have news also that in Tenancingo there was damage to church property. But I want you to concentrate on more serious offenses, sisters and brothers: in San Martín they robbed not only the sacred vessels but the Blessed Sacrament. That is grievous because persons of faith know that the Lord is present in the consecrated host. Let us hope that these words will reach the persons who perpetrated this horrendous sacrilege. We are talking about the eucharistic presence of the Lord. Let them respect it and return the hosts for the people's adoration. A eucharistic act has been organized so that all of us can take part in making reparation for this offense against the Lord's presence; it will take place next Saturday, December 2, at seven o'clock in the evening in the church of San Martín. We will be there, and we hope that a great many of the faithful who love the Blessed Sacrament will also attend. Let us hope that by that time we'll be able to announce that the hosts have reappeared.

This week we'll be able to see some of the wonderful ways in which human development is being promoted under Christian auspices. Next Saturday there will be an activity of Fe y Alegría, and there'll also be an activity of the academy for seamstresses in Mercedes Umaña, to which they have kindly invited me.

I also want to express my thanks for the commentaries being made by the magazine *Paz y Justicia* concerning our pastoral letter. The latest issue, which is now on sale, contains a commentary on the problem of violence that tries to explain the doctrine in simple words⁵.

⁴ The Symphonic Orchestra of El Salvador informed the mass media that the priest in charge of the parish of El Rosario prevented them from giving a concert during the Mass in honor of St Cecilia. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (24 November 1978).

⁵ *Justice and Peace: Bulletin of the Rural Christian Communities*, no. 77, San Salvador, November 1978.

Another effort to popularize and disseminate this doctrine may be found in a series of popular booklets published by the UCA called *El Guanaquito*; six of the booklets present my pastoral letter in simple language that is easily understood by *campesinos*. I am grateful to them for this very fine effort for it is aimed at making accessible to *campesinos* lessons that are of great interest to them. These booklets can also be obtained at the UCA.

I also want to ask the prayers of our community today for the eternal rest of Doña Aminta de Osegueda, the wife of a good friend and great journalist, the director of *El Diario de Oriente* of San Miguel, also deceased. I also promised the mother of Marisela Guadalupe González Flores that we would pray for this girl who drowned at San Diego beach just before she turned fifteen. Let us pray, then, that her fifteenth birthday, which she has celebrated in eternity, will bring consolation to her grieving family.

In the context of the communion of our church, sisters and brothers, I also want to express my sincere gratitude to the United Kingdom, where they have surprised me by presenting my poor name as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize⁶. Many people have congratulated me, and I want to express my sincere gratitude to all those persons. From all the letters of congratulation I want to single out the thoughts expressed by the Association of Professionals of Juridical Studies. Among other things, they say that this nomination represents an endorsement on the part of authorities and associations that are truly representative of the people of Great Britain; moreover, it is the response of international public opinion to those who attack the archbishop's position. That is how I see it, sisters and brothers. It is a show of support for which I'm profoundly grateful. I would like to make it clear, for some people who may be confused, that it is not the award of the Nobel Prize itself; it is simply a nomination or a candidacy for the award. And I am the first to admit that there are other persons who deserve the prize much more than I do, and I'll be quite happy if, when the award is made, this nomination from England is not considered and the prize is given in justice to someone who truly deserves it. As a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize, I will yield with affection to whoever has the honor of receiving it. [Applause]

What more could I want than your applause! Indeed, this applause in no way profanes the temple, because it is a free and spontaneous expression of the people's feelings. What they cannot say with their lips they express in this beautiful way. I thank you, then, because your acclamation means that the pastoral, evangelical approach to which I try to be faithful is not something crazy or subversive. It is simply humble fidelity to the command of the Lord on which we are now going to reflect.

Other expressions of solidarity have arrived from abroad. Amnesty International and other organizations are sending us many letters and cablegrams referring to our situation and

⁶ In October 1978, 118 parliamentarians from both houses in the United Kingdom of Great Britain wrote a letter to the Nobel Committee in Oslo proposing Archbishop Romero for the Nobel Peace Prize. Among other things, the letter states, «With all earnestness we wish to recommend Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, for the Nobel Peace Prize.... Since he was named archbishop, he has been tireless and unyielding in his denunciation of the arrests, the tortures, the disappearances, and the massacres that are taking place these days in El Salvador. As a man dedicated to peace, he has deplored violence of all kinds and has fought for social and economic reform in order to do away with the injustices of El Salvador's misery-ridden feudal society. Standing almost alone, he has become the champion of the poor and the defenseless. As a result he is subject daily to terrible vilification on the part of the press and other media». See *Orientación* (10 December 1978).

supporting us in our efforts⁷. In recent days we have received ninety-two telegrams and thirty-eight letters, all of which are opposed to ORDEN and condemn their maltreatment of *campesinos*. These letters speak in favor of human rights, especially as regards San Pedro Perulapán and Cinquera. They also advocate freedom for political prisoners and speak of the pain our people feel because of the malnutrition of our children. The letters also express solidarity with the struggles of the people's organizations, and they denounce specific cases of persons who were arrested. A priest who works with doctors, lawyers, and members of Christian Action sent us a letter saying that they have spoken out against torture. All of these letters in our archives are clear evidence that the church's position in favor of human rights is legitimate and receives solid backing from around the world.

I rejoice also at the solidarity shown by the First Assembly of the Churches of Latin America, a group of Protestant churches that met in Oaxtepec, Mexico. In a beautiful letter addressed to CELAM they affirmed their solidarity with our reading of the Gospel in terms of liberation. They wrote as follows: «Our continent desperately needs the liberating message of the Gospel. Defense of life, ministry to the oppressed, struggle for justice, affirmation of human dignity, incarnated proclamation of the kingdom, and hope for its coming—these are all essential dimensions of the Good News that we are called to announce». Here in El Salvador there is also a branch of Protestantism that is in close agreement with our church, and I am happy to see that our separated sisters and brothers are not letting themselves be deceived. They are understanding that the Gospel cannot be used to serve political aims. The Gospel can be used only for the service the Lord desires, as the Protestants have just stated in Oaxtepec.

We received also—and I tell you this with profound joy—a letter from a contemplative sister who is offering her every sacrifice and all her holiness for our archdiocese.

Continuing our review of this past week from a religious perspective, we were all stunned by that mass suicide which has already resulted in the death of more than 800 persons⁸. Sisters and brothers, this should be for us a warning against religious ignorance! Let us study our religion! Today there is a certain enthusiasm about sects. There are the people who call themselves gnostics, and also some folks who wear strange clothes and have bizarre hairstyles—I don't know what they're called. Where are all these things taking us? Certainly, freedom of belief is a human right. The Second Vatican Council issued a document on religious freedom⁹, but freedom of belief does not excuse people from the obligation to seek the truth and humbly accept the faith, as was stated recently in the *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official newspaper of the Holy See. When people discover the Christian faith revealed to us by God, they freely accept it. None of you who are here today in the cathedral has come here by force. True freedom is the freedom to believe, the freedom to profess the truth one has found, the truth of our faith. But the kind of freedom that leads people to frightful aberrations such as mass suicide—how can that be the truth?

Therefore, sisters and brothers, as we come to the end of this liturgical year, let us analyze this passage of the Gospel of Saint Matthew. This is not the end of the gospel itself but is Christ's final great discourse, his eschatological discourse. Saint Matthew organized his gospel in such a way as to offer us today a magnificent summary of what is most essential in Christ's message for humankind. We should not be confused about this scene of the universal

⁷ «Solidarity» in *Orientación* (26 November 1978).

⁸ Reference to the mass suicide committed by members of the People's Temple, under the leadership of Jim Jones, in Georgetown, Guyana, on 18 November 1978. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (21 November 1978).

⁹ *Dignitatis humanae*, the document of the Council on religious freedom (7 December 1965).

judgment, understanding it only in a literal sense. What it is basically is a reflection of the early church that presents to us the essential message of Christianity in a form that captures our imagination.

Accordingly, in light of these readings for the feast of Christ the King, I want to present my homily under the title, «Christ's Kingdom Will Have No End», which is what we proclaim in the creed. Today as we meditate on these words, «Christ's kingdom will have no end», I will take from today's readings three thoughts which try to answer the question, «Why does Christ's kingdom have no end?» The first answer is that God is the foundation of that kingdom; it arises from God, moves toward God, and becomes a reality by God's will. The second answer to the question of why Christ's reign has no end is that his law is love. The pope has just told us that only love builds us up. No kingdom founded on repression, violence, and hatred can endure. Christ's kingdom is a kingdom of love, and that's why it is an eternal kingdom. And the third reason that Christ's kingdom is without end is that its king, Jesus Christ, is the eternal living one.

Let me express a few thoughts that crowd into my mind right now, because what is most beautiful about this moment of reflection is that it lets us plunge deeply into God's word as embodied in our history. We must not forget to keep our feet firmly planted on earth. Here in El Salvador we are moving forward, all of us with our particular histories, but we are also plunging into God's kingdom together as Salvadorans of our time in search of enlightenment.

Christ's kingdom will have no end because God is its foundation

First of all, it is a kingdom that has God as its origin and foundation. In today's gospel, when Christ summons the blessed ones, he speaks to them these words: «Come, blessed ones, and inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world» (Matt 25:34). This is not some improvised kingdom. Notice how history begins with God's will. While it is true that we humans participate actively in history, God is still the Lord of history, and all history flows from the will of God. Creation was God's first gesture. At first there was nothing existing, but then, when something began to exist, God already had his kingdom in mind. As the most noble members of this creation, human beings will arrive at the kingdom of salvation, the kingdom of glory. That's why the kingdom of Christ is eternal; it is not something invented by humans; it has its origin in God's mind. Today's second reading tells us that Christ is like a king who has brought all under his sway (1 Cor 15:7b). As he did on the cross, he speaks to his eternal Father those beautiful words that express the supreme satisfaction of one who has done his duty: *Consummatum est*, «It has been accomplished» (John 19:30). That's how I imagine Christ at the end of time: reigning as the universal king of all that has been won by his redemption, he declares, «Mission accomplished!»

Saint Paul says, «He will hand over his kingdom to the Father so that God will be all in all» (1 Cor 15:24-28). Can't you imagine, sisters and brothers, what a glorious moment that will be when each of us creatures is even a tiny atom in that kingdom of creation that Christ will hand over to the Father, that kingdom that will never end? Who is ever left alone in history? What atom will become distant and lost? Everything is foreseen. Even the tiniest child, even the nameless *campesino* who harvests coffee, even the most insignificant person will find a place in this kingdom that Christ will hand over to the Father who will then be all in all without exception. Who will be great in the kingdom of heaven? Those who are most filled with Christ!

If God is the origin of this kingdom which will therefore have no end, then God is its goal, for Christ will hand the kingdom over to the Father. We should therefore understand from this very moment that only God is absolute and everything else is relative. Do not forget these words: only God is absolute. Only God encompasses history from beginning to end. Even before history began God was alive, and after history ends God will continue to be alive. History is nothing more than a short episode, almost a plaything of God. When history ends and Christ hands history over to the Father, this kingdom will continue to exist eternally as an adornment, as a garment, as a palace, as a temple of God. We are, Saint Peter tells us, «living stones» building up that eternal kingdom of God (1 Pet 2:5).

In today's first reading God appears as one who is zealously concerned about his kingdom. It is sad to read the prophet's portrayal of the bad pastors who refuse to understand the ways in which God wants them to lead his people. They are shepherds who feed themselves and not their flock; they are the rulers and pastors of both secular and religious kingdoms who make their reign consist in self-worship. That is not what God wants. «In those days, says the Lord, the people who have suffered because of the bad leadership of their shepherds will return from exile, and I myself will gather the sheep that were scattered in the storm. I will care for them and hand them over to my Son, the Messiah» (Ezek 34:11-12).

That is what is happening today in the church, sisters and brothers. The eternal Father has chosen us and has handed us over to his Son to work for his kingdom. Remember the final prayer of Christ on Holy Thursday: «Father, I thank you for this group of disciples. They are yours, but you have given them to me. I return them now to you, and none of them was lost except the son of perdition» (John 17:12). Judas, the son of perdition, was lost because he did not know how to receive this kingdom of God. Dear sisters and brothers, I wouldn't like there to be even a single Judas in the church. I want all of us to be saved with Christ in this kingdom that has God as its foundation.

Christ's kingdom will have no end because his law is love

Our second point is that it is a kingdom that has love as its law. Let us not forget this. This is precisely the message of today's gospel reading. Saint John of the Cross has a very beautiful verse that reads: «In the evening of your life they will examine you about love»¹⁰. That's what they will examine us on. They won't examine us to see if we earned a lot of money or if we won a lot of applause. They won't examine us about how great we were in the world or how much we were acclaimed. Nothing of the sort. All that is gone. They will examine us about love. The essence of Christ's message is in this passage about the final judgment as presented to us today by Saint Matthew: «I was hungry, and you gave me to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink» (Matt 25:35). It's not that Saint Matthew is neglecting faith. Faith is what first impels a person to draw near to Christ, but if faith does not become concrete in practical love and in works, then that faith is dead. There are so many people who say, «But I know Christ, and I try to pray to him!» Yes, but their prayers are like those of the priest in the gospel parable who abandoned the poor wounded Samaritan on the road because he was in a hurry to pray (Luke 10:31). Faith is not enough.

¹⁰ The original words of Saint John of the Cross are these: «A la tarde te examinarán del amor, aprende a amar como Dios quiere ser amado [In the afternoon they will examine you about love. Learn to love as God wants to be loved]». The lines are from his work *Dichos de luz y amor*. See *Obras Completas*, Madrid 1988, 94.

Many people have taken heart this week because the pope told the religious sisters and brothers that they should not take radical political positions¹¹. «Now you see», they are saying, «the pope is telling you not to meddle in politics!» But consider the matter carefully. As I've told you before, you should listen with critical ears. What the pope is condemning is radical positions. If priests or religious have a strictly horizontal perspective and fight only for temporal kinds of redemption, then yes, they have betrayed their vocation. What the pope said is what I also say humbly in my pastoral letter, where I tell the priests that the greatest liberation people expect from them is being motivated by the sublime liberation of Christ¹². But the pope doesn't exclude commitment. Listen to the whole of his homily in Saint John Lateran, where he says that as the new bishop of Rome he is in solidarity with the just claims of the people whom he has to shepherd¹³. He said that the struggle for human rights is an urgent task of the church. Radical politics, according to today's gospel passage, would mean devoting oneself only to giving food to the hungry and water to the thirsty; it would mean limiting oneself to material needs. But read the whole of today's passage. Those who are saved are amazed; they claim they have never seen Christ, and yet he tells them, «I was hungry and you gave me to eat». They ask him, «When, Lord?» What he tells them is very interesting: «As long as you did it for one of these, my little brothers or sisters, you did it for me» (Matt 25:35,37,41).

The horizontal becomes vertical when our charity is motivated by true love of God. Therefore, when we despise the poor person or the harvester of coffee or sugar cane or cotton, it is the face of Christ we despise. Let us think, sisters and brothers, of the *campesinos* who even today are traveling about in search of sustenance for the whole year. Let us not forget them for they are the face of Christ. The face of Christ is there among the sacks and baskets of the harvesters. The face of Christ is there in the torture and cruelty of the prisons. The face of Christ is dying of hunger in the children who have nothing to eat. The face of Christ is the needy person who asks the church to speak out. How can the church refuse if it is Christ who is telling her, «Speak for me»? At the hour of that final judgment I don't want to be on the left side hearing the words: «Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire, for I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was in need and you did not care for me» (Matt 25:41-42). You were more concerned about the purity of your orthodoxy; you were more concerned about quiet time for your prayer; you were more concerned about your congregation or your school. You didn't want to contaminate yourself with derelicts. You were worried about your social and economic and political prestige, and that's why you despised those who were asking you for help—and there I was!» This is the norm by which Christ will judge us. His kingdom is love, a love that builds us up.

How surprised we'll be at that time of judgment! This gospel passage turns upside down the things we believe are necessary. This week I heard someone commenting on the pope's discourse: «See, the pope is putting things in order. He told the nuns that they should wear their habits». But this is really secondary. What the pope really told them is that they should be proud of their habits¹⁴. But the habit does not make the monk; what makes the monk is love,

¹¹ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Roman Clergy», 9 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (19 November 1978). The pope's actual words were these: «Let us not have the illusion of serving the Gospel if we try to "dilute" our priestly charism with an excessive interest in the broad field of temporal problems».

¹² *The Church and the People's Political Organizations* (6 August 1978) 27.

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, «Homily in the Basilica of St John Lateran», 12 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (19 November 1978).

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, «Discourse to the Clergy of Rome», 9 November 1978, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (19 November 1978). The pope's actual words were these: «We should preserve the significance of our singular vocation, and its "singularity" should be shown also in the way we dress. Let us not be ashamed of it!»

love of Christ that is translated into benevolence and love of neighbor (Luke 10:31). No matter how properly dressed priests or sisters are, if they leave the wounded abandoned by the roadside, they are not good priests or sisters. I'm not defending the secular attitudes of some of them. I'm just talking about what's essential in the Gospel, not what's accidental. I tell you, at that hour of judgment we'll be taken by surprise when we see that Christ pays no attention to what we thought was so necessary. And what we thought was unnecessary is what Christ will examine us on: «How did you treat the hungry and the thirsty who were my representatives?» In these countries of ours, dear sisters and brothers, Christ is so profusely present. It would be a shame for us to live so surrounded by Christ's presence—because we are truly saturated with poor people—and not to have recognized him there. It would be a shame to have spent so many years with comforts, with wealth, with political benefits, and not to have been concerned about that Christ who knocked at our doors or met us on the streets.

This morning I ask God's forgiveness for not having always been the Christian that God would have liked to examine at the hour of death. My sisters and brothers, it is with you that I share responsibility for being church, and I hope to make up for my faults by telling all of you that we should truly make God's kingdom a kingdom where the greatest law is love.

The kingdom will have no end because its king is Jesus Christ

Finally, Christ's kingdom will be eternal because the king is Christ himself. The second reading points this out clearly, but let us focus on the gospel. Saint Matthew is unique in referring to Christ as king, a title that Christ never used for himself; in fact, he fled when the people wanted to make him king (John 6:15). Nevertheless, Saint Matthew, along with the first Christians, considered Christ a king, not in the same political sense as the Jews who wanted to crown him but as the true king. «When the king comes in glory and sits on his throne, he will summon all the nations of earth» (Matt 25:31,34). With this image Matthew dramatizes what I've been telling you on previous Sundays about the three words the Scriptures use to describe Christian expectation: *parousia* was the Greek word used in ancient times to designate the arrival of a ruler in a city; the word *epiphany* means «manifestation», such as when a king is going to appear or a pope is going to be crowned; and *apocalypse* also means «revelation» or «manifestation». These three words are the ones Saint Matthew had in mind when he wrote, «When the king comes with all his angels, he will sit upon his throne and summon all the nations» (Matt 25:31). That indeed will be the great *parousia*, the epiphany, the apocalypse of Christ.

According to the second reading and the gospel, the king has three powers. He is not a pseudo-king, nor is he the king who was ridiculed in Pontius Pilate's palace by soldiers who crowned him with thorns and made sport at him (John 19:1). This king is different. He is the same Christ, but now he comes not to suffer but to judge. In today's gospel he is shown to possess the three great powers of all authority: legislative power, judicial power, and coercive power. Legislative power is the power to make laws; judicial power is the power to apply the laws and to pass judgment on those who violate the laws; and coercive power is the power to punish the rebellious. When Christ judges according to the law of love, he is legislator and judge, separating those who are to be condemned from those who are to be saved. He is the supreme judge who on that day will make true justice shine forth, the justice that is today so mocked even in the highest courts. Before the high court of Christ there will be no bribes. His might, which is coercive, not by force of arms but by the power of reason and right, will bring about what his word declares: «Go, accursed ones, into the eternal fire» (Matt 25:41). And so it

will be, for today's gospel ends with these words: «And these will go off to eternal punishment while the others will enter the kingdom that has no end» (Matt 25:46).

Today Saint Paul presents this kingdom to us in a cosmic perspective. It is the creation that God wants to place beneath the rule of Christ. God wants to restore all things in Christ, for Christ is the key to creation. That's why Saint Paul calls him the «first fruits» (1 Cor 15:20). This term, which is very biblical and liturgical, refers to the first fruits of the harvest. When the first ears of corn or the first produce of the harvest are brought to the temple, they are called the «first fruits». The harvest being referred to here is the harvest of the resurrection. Just as the harvest of crops is guaranteed by the offering of the first fruits, so the resurrection of all of us is guaranteed by the first fruits of Christ's resurrection. If the first ears of corn look good, then the final harvest will be great! With the risen Christ as a splendid example of the final harvest, then surely we'll all be raised!

Christ is the head of humankind because «if by one man death entered the world», if we all must die someday, it is because our first forefather, Adam, was given a sentence of death that is carried out also in his descendants (1 Cor 15:21a). Death is a mystery of solidarity. In like manner, resurrection and eternal life involve solidarity with a second Adam who became the head of the human race for the sake of redemption (Cor 15:21b). That's why Christ told Nicodemus, «If you are not born again of water and the Holy Spirit, you cannot enter the kingdom of God» (John 3:5). That's why baptism is necessary. Confirmation is not as necessary as baptism; it is a reinforcement of baptism. That's why it's left until the age when the children are aware of the sacrament's meaning. As of next Sunday, the First Sunday of Advent, we will no longer confirm small children who don't understand the sacrament. There will still be the obligation to baptize them as soon as possible because baptism is what incorporates children into Christ's redemption. But before we have them explicitly ratify that incorporation we should wait until they have mature use of reason; that is when they can be confirmed.

This king is immortal, and his victory is absolute. Saint Paul tells us today that the principalities, the powers, and the authorities will be destroyed and Christ's enemies will be placed under his feet (1 Cor 15:24-25). This is a very picturesque way of portraying the destiny of all the arrogance and bravado that is nowadays being directed against the church. The persecution, the hatred, and the defamation will come to naught, for God says, «I will place your enemies as a footstool for your feet» (1 Cor 15:25). When all the powers have been dominated, Christ will hand the kingdom over to the Father (1 Cor 15:24). He is the true liberator who frees us from every form of servitude. That's why when we proclaim here the kingdom of Christ, we are not departing from our history. What we are saying is that the plague of violence we are now experiencing will also be subdued by God's kingdom and those who are guilty of causing the violence will be made footstools if they are not converted in time.

Events of the week

For example, the cases of arson have continued, with at least five or six fires in these last few days. Why do these crimes remain a mystery? Why is there no reflection of God's justice in response to so many criminal deeds? We have also deplored in these days the kidnappings of

two more persons: the manager of Televisión Educativa and the manager of Phillips of El Salvador¹⁵.

We have also heard the voice of Amnesty International in this country; they are demanding amnesty for political prisoners¹⁶. In the country of Argentina there's a very beautiful slogan: «Christmas without political prisoners!» Two years ago today, on 26 November 1976, Lyl Milagro Ramírez and Manuel Alberto Rivera Vázquez were captured by the National Guard. Today also marks the first anniversary of the disappearance of Professor Efraín Arévalo Ibarra and the laborer Alfredo Mendoza. We have also received news of assaults in Cinquera¹⁷. For all these reasons, sisters and brothers, we raise a voice for freedom: «Christmas without political prisoners!» Whatever the motivation of others who ask for amnesty, we who are the church of Christ are in solidarity with that call. When the supreme Judge declares, «I was in prison, and you did nothing for me» (Matt 25:43), we will respond to him, «Lord, we have done everything possible, but the forces of evil have been powerful and will remain so until you make them your footstool» (1 Cor 15:25). In the meantime I urge all the noble forces in El Salvador to take action. What I ask is this: freedom for all those who are suffering unjustly. Either bring them before the courts to be judged, or let them go free! In El Salvador we want a Christmas without the torments and the tortures of the clandestine prisons.

Every Thursday from 5:30 to 5:45 o'clock, our radio station YSAX will broadcast a program dedicated to the defense of justice and the law, especially for the sector of rural workers, where it is so needed these days. We won't be giving voice to false denunciations but simply informing about the complaints that have been presented to the Ministry of Labor and the actions the ministry has taken regarding them. We understand that the Ministry of Labor is responsible for the labor situation in the country; it has the duty to be concerned with the strikes and the discontent among factory workers and coffee harvesters and those laboring elsewhere. We keep telling people that they must have recourse to this ministry. YSAX will echo this plea and will also provide news that comes from the Ministry of Labor. So we hope that this publicity will move people to comply with laws that are presently not being observed.

Finally I ask for your solidarity with Nicaragua, which is going through some very difficult moments. I received a copy of a telegram that the Catholic associations sent to the pope in support of their archbishop, Obando y Bravo. They pointed out that the nuncio has not supported the archbishop as he should, and they asked the Holy Father to see the justice of supporting the pastor who they feel is very close to their situation.

Let us pray for all these difficult situations of the country and the world. There are many more besides, but this day of Christ the King helps us to see the need for our celebration. Let us now move to the altar where Christ becomes present. He is still hidden, but we are his people, and we are his kingdom. Let us be true to our faith in Christ by manifesting it in love of our sister and brothers. In the evening of life the supreme Judge of history and of each one of us

¹⁵ Jorge Rosales Álvarez, the manager of Televisión Educativa, was kidnapped on 22 November 1978 and freed one day later; no group claimed responsibility for this kidnapping. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (23 & 24 November 1978). In a separate incident, the Dutch citizen Fritz Schuitema was kidnapped on 24 November 1978 by the FARN. See *La Prensa Gráfica* (30 November 1978).

¹⁶ *Orientación* (26 November 1978).

¹⁷ «Cinquera, Land of Repression» in *Orientación* (10 December 1978).

St Oscar Romero, Christ the King (Year A), 26 November 1978

will judge us on our love. Let us work hard from this very moment, for that judgment will be final. Let it be so. [Applause]