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CHRIST, UNIVERSAL REVELATION OF SALVATION

The Epiphany of the Lord

8 January 1978

Isaiah 60:1-6

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

My dear sisters and brothers.

Before I give my homily, we'll have the pleasure of hearing Father Robert Drinan, a priest of the Society of Jesus who is visiting with us; he is a member of the United States Congress. With the permission of his superiors, he is effectively involved in the politics of North America. He was formerly dean of the Boston College Law School. During the days that Archbishop McGrath was with us, he spoke eloquently about Father Drinan, saying that his political role has in no way diminished the meaning of his priesthood. One of his priestly gestures has greatly impressed me: he wanted to concelebrate with me this morning in order to express his communion with our church.

On behalf of the archdiocese present this morning at this Mass in the cathedral, I want to express, through Father Drinan, our gratitude to our sister church in the United States from whom we have received many expressions of solidarity, support, and assistance. Father Drinan's presence among us is the presence of the North American church, and through him the bonds of Catholic fraternity between our churches are strengthened. We are going to listen to him as he greets our archdiocese. His words will be translated by Father Ronald.

Message of Father Robert Drinan¹

Your Excellency, Archbishop Romero, clergy, sisters and brothers gathered here.

Today we celebrate the feast of the three magi who, following the star, traveled from the East and finally found Christ in the manger. Each one of us must also follow our star, the star that guides us to Christ.

Each nation and country also has a star to follow. Today El Salvador is following her star along a very difficult road. The people of El Salvador recognize that they have a right for their persons and their dignity to be respected. The people of El Salvador realize that they have a right to expect that the laws of their country will be respected. The good people of El Salvador are aware that they have human, economic, and political rights. The people of El Salvador do not want communism or Marxism, and those who say that the Salvadoran people or the

¹ The text that follows is the transcription of the simultaneous translation of the message of Father Robert Drinan, who shared the homily with Archbishop Romero.

Salvadoran clergy are inviting communism here are insulting the intelligence of every Salvadoran. The Salvadoran people desire to have their human rights as proclaimed by the Gospel and by the international laws in every country.

Some persons and some public officials here in this country are frightened at the thought of the equality of persons and the dignity of all people. These same persons and officials want to silence the priests who proclaim this dignity and equality by deporting them from the country or imprisoning them or eliminating them in one form or other. But the people, the faithful of El Salvador, are united with their clergy and with their archbishop, a very dedicated man, and they are in solidarity with all the principles of Catholicism.

The Congress of the United States earnestly wants these human rights to be effective for you and for all the peoples of the world. The Congress strongly supports President Jimmy Carter in his declaration that the United States will strive for human rights to be respected everywhere. These rights include not being threatened or harassed by the government or by others. These rights include the right to have a credible press, a press that people can trust. These rights also include the right to food, to work, to a decent home. Seven years ago I entered Congress with a mandate to help people in every country obtain these rights. The struggle for equality here in this country is closely watched by the Congress of the United States. The Congress has great hope; they offer you their hearts, their work, and their prayers.

Like the three magi, all of us are following our star in this new year. Let us remember the words of the founder of the Jesuits, Saint Ignatius: «When we want freedom, equality, and rights, we have to pray as though everything depended on us. And when we want this freedom, we also have to work as though everything depended on us». Many thanks.

My first words² are to express personal gratitude and admiration for this illustrious member of the United States Congress, who in his message to the Salvadoran people has united Christian courage with political service. He has risen above the vacillations of the political world and placed before us the eternal values of the Gospel. I thank him because his words mean much to us. He provides support and confirmation for what I said before about strong communion among the churches of the entire world. He helps us to see that our archdiocese, in communion with the pope and in communion with the church around the world, is walking in pursuit of her star.

That's a beautiful expression Father Drinan has used: «All peoples have their star». I believe this is precisely the meaning of today's celebration. Just as the magi from the East followed their star and were filled with immense joy when they found Jesus, so too we must persevere in these hours of uncertainty, shadows, and darkness such as the magi also had. We must keep following that star, the star of our faith, the star of our particular Salvadoran fidelity to this faith that enlightens all peoples. Accordingly, sisters and brothers, I want to place my Epiphany reflections in this context. I find in today's biblical readings three thoughts that coincide with the message the Salvadoran people need to hear: first, the universality of Christ's call; second, the equality of all people as proclaimed today by Saint Paul; and third, the great concept of transcendence, which is the light of God that penetrates every person and brings about the intimate renewal we all need.

² After Robert Drinan's message, Archbishop Romero continues the homily.

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The universality of Christ's call

The first reading from Isaiah describes the beautiful panorama of God's kingdom as the presence of God in Jerusalem. Through this presence, God becomes the light of dawn for the people who are walking in darkness. The prophet Isaiah's expression is exquisite: «Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come. The glory of the Lord shines upon you. See, darkness covers the earth, and thick clouds cover the people; but upon you the Lord shines. Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you. Your sons come from afar, and your daughters in the arms of their nurses. Caravans of camels shall fill you, dromedaries from Midian and Ephah; all from Sheba shall come» (Isa 60:1-2,4,6). This is just the beginning of a long list of peoples who come searching for God, like the magi.

Epiphany is the name of today's feast. The child born in Bethlehem and making brilliant the longest night of the year is a sign that God is already present. By his light, which is like a dawn that conquers the darkness, the peoples feel new hope being born. The magi from the mysterious East were the first to be favored. This day marks the beginning of a long procession joined in the course of time by nation after nation. On this eighth of January (the Sunday to which the feast is transferred), we here in this cathedral, together with the communities that join us in our reflection, become part of that procession of peoples. Our Salvadoran people, following their star, go forth in search of that light and that hope. It is no longer just the camels of Midian and Ephah; it is no longer just the royalty of Sheba; it is now whole continents—Latin America, Africa, Asia—that are converging on this unity of faith in Christ.

Let us look this morning, sisters and brothers, on this church which extends far beyond the tiny geographical speck which is El Salvador. We feel that we are sisters and brothers with all the peoples of Central America, of this continent, of North America, of Canada, of Europe. And we are all called to follow this light.

What is marvelous to consider is that in this convocation of peoples God—the God of nations—respects the freedom, the customs, and the unique way of being of each people. The reading from Isaiah tells us, «The riches of the sea shall be emptied before you, and the wealth of nations shall be brought to you» (Isa 60:5). This kingdom of God certainly has no need of our material goods, but we recognize that God is the origin of our coffee crops, our sugar cane, our cotton fields, all our wealth, and all the wealth of the world, and he has a right to all of these things. So we generously offer these things to God, recognizing that he owns them all, just as the magi placed gold, frankincense and myrrh by the Christ Child's crib. Everything that the world produces is God's. The true wealth of the church as God's kingdom is the realization that all the differences among the world's peoples come from God. God has created in this world a kingdom rich like no other because all the marvels of the earth are his. Everything produced by human cultures belongs to God. It is God who promotes and guides all the wealth and progress of the peoples.

Under the sign of bread and wine the priests of all latitudes of the world tell the Lord that we are offering him, in this bread and in this wine, the work of human hands. When we say «the work of human hands», we understand this to be the work of all the latitudes of the world. We offer it all to God because without God human labors and human progress have no meaning. We all contribute to this kingdom of God.

This feast of the Epiphany, sisters and brothers, is the opportune time for us to feel that we are truly Salvadorans and to tell the Lord that all the wealth he has given to us is truly his and that we, as his images on earth, have to work so that that this wealth brings happiness and benefit to all his children. As the pope told the ambassador of El Salvador, we need a more just social order «that will correct the evident injustices which prevent created goods from being shared equitably by all humankind»³. This is the richness of this Epiphany: it summons all people on whom the Lord's light shines to live as sisters and brothers so that in every nation all may share equally in the sustenance of their human nature.

The equality of all people

My sisters and brothers, my second thought is taken from what the one-time persecutor, Saint Paul, tells us today. He persecuted Christians because his heart was narrow; like other Jews of his time, he thought that God existed only for his class, only for Judaism. It seemed to him a profanation of the national identity to preach a Christ who announced a kingdom for all peoples. This Paul, so narrow-hearted as a Jew, felt his heart open wide to the whole world when God called him to be the herald of the great plan that God had kept hidden for centuries. He says in his letter to the Ephesians, «The Gentiles also are coheirs, members of the same body and copartners in the promise in Christ Jesus» (Eph 3:6).

This is the reason for our equality. There is no longer distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal 3:28). There is no longer a privileged people and a marginalized people. All of us are coheirs in the mystery of Christ. The inheritance of God our Father is for all of us who are sisters and brothers. Christ, the elder brother and heir of all the promises, makes us his sisters and brothers; he makes us «coheirs», a word invented by Saint Paul. That «co-» indicates an equality that can be expressed only in terms of two equal siblings who receive the same inheritance, becoming coheirs of all that God has promised.

In Christ all human beings are called to this wealth of God's kingdom. We are members of the same body. In all his theology Saint Paul develops the meaning of this equality which makes all of us members of one body. God did not make us to live dispersed and separated. We need one another. The head can never tell the feet, «I don't need you». The hands cannot tell the heart it's unnecessary, nor can the heart say that to the other members. All the members, each in its proper function, are members of the living body (1 Cor 12:12-26).

This is precisely the way that we must function as Salvadoran Christians. In this country of baptized persons we must recognize the role that each person must play to make our country happy, to free our country of violence and repression, to make it a land where no one feels he has a right to everything while others live on the margins with no rights at all. We must create a nation where we all feel we are living members, even if we are poor, for out of our poverty and our work we will love and serve the whole body, whether from the head or from the heart. No one should feel any superiority but rather should feel called to serve the whole organism whose parts mutually depend on one another.

This is the equality that Christianity preaches, not an equality that cuts off heads so that all can be equal. That would be crazy! That would be utopian! We do not preach an equality in which everyone keeps quiet. Rather we preach an equality in which all people feel like children

³ PAUL VI, «Address before the El Salvador Ambassador» in *L'Osservatore Romano* (18 December 1977).

who contribute in a home to the best of their ability. As we said during the celebration of the World Day of Peace, peace is not the product of violence or of repression that silences people. Peace is the calm and generous contribution of all for the good of all. Peace is dynamic; peace is generous. Peace is a right and a duty that makes us all feel that we have a place in this beautiful family on which the Epiphany shines the light of God.

There is yet another comparison in Saint Paul's letter that expresses this idea of equality: «You are copartners in the promise of Christ Jesus» (Eph 3:6). When we read the Bible, we find many promises of God's love for humanity. These promises are made through Christ for apart from Christ God promises nothing. God calls us to conversion only in Christ. But in Christ, the sum of all things, the yes of God's promises, we all have this equality. Christ fulfills God's promises regarding the happiness of people on earth and the hope for heaven as long as we accept this doctrine of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That is why I was delighted to hear today the words of a congressman from the United States, a priest working for the common good of the great people of North America. He has not lost sight of the Gospel vision which he must preach by reason of his vocation. I am pleased to have heard this priest and congressman say that the defense of human rights, equality, and freedom is not just a matter of politics. Yes, it is a political matter, but it is rooted in the Gospel. The Gospel defends and proclaims all of the great, fundamental rights of the human person. It proclaims equality even when doing so is politically inconvenient. Let us suppose that tomorrow it is no longer convenient for the United States to defend the rights of El Salvador. Humanly speaking, politics can fail us, but the Gospel will never fail us. It will continue to cry out for human freedom and human dignity, even during the worst situations of persecution. The pope has recently said just that: «The church claims as her own this freedom to preach her Gospel, a Gospel that defends people and cries out for their dignity and freedom»⁴.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, on this feast of the Epiphany when we celebrate the contribution of all people to the Christian common good, it is highly symbolic that a man from the United States should bring us a message in priestly language and tell us that the Epiphany is not just a remembrance of some magi of twenty centuries ago. Epiphany is the contribution, the support, the communion of all those who through Christ and his Gospel participate in God's great promises to humanity. For God there are no distinctions. All are his children, members of the same body whose head is his Son made man, and all are heirs to happiness on earth and to hope for life beyond history.

Transcendence is the light of God

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, don't forget that this preaching of the church is in no way subversive; this preaching is not revolutionary. Father Drinan has just reminded us, with all the prestige of his position and his wisdom as a lawyer, that those who want to attack the church and accuse her of being communist are insulting our Christian intelligence.

In other words, when the church preaches in defense of these rights and on behalf of freedom and equality, she does so on the basis of transcendence. I would like you to grasp this message of transcendence well. We heard it in the reading from Isaiah: «Rise up in splendor, Jerusalem! Your light has come. The glory of the Lord shines upon you!» (Isa 60:1). Saint Paul

⁴ Ibid.

expresses it also when he says that the Spirit revealed the great plan of God to the holy apostles and prophets (Eph 3:5).

What is this transcendence? Transcendence means that we in the church do not preach an earth-based liberation, a revolution that seeks to resolve problems with violence and abductions and repression and crime. That is not the voice of the church. Whenever the church preaches that all must be treated worthily as free and equal persons, she appeals to the light of God: «The light of God shines on you!» The dignity the church proclaims is based on the freedom of those who break the chains of sin and become children of God. It is not based on economics, on having more—that is quite secondary. The development of the human person is based on people's own awareness that they are children of God, enlightened by God, and intimately renewed in the depths of their hearts. At Medellin the bishops said, «There will be no new continent without new persons» (M 1:3), that is, the transcendence of being renewed in God.

The light of God should shed light on this struggle of the church and this renewal in Christ. Our hope is that this earth, even if it is not paradise, still in some way will reflect the reality of paradise. The kingdom of God, which will be perfect only in eternity, must nevertheless be reflected in our relations here on earth because such matters cannot simply be improvised. The citizen of heaven must first be a good citizen on earth. Those who want to take part in the promises of eternity must collaborate with God in justice and peace and love in this kingdom of earth. And so, sisters and brothers, the struggle of the church is precisely to sow more love, to awaken greater hope, to help sinners repent of their sins and draw closer to God, and to renew us all interiorly. As long as we fail to understand this language about the light of the Epiphany, we will have no clear concept of the liberation the church is preaching.

Dear sisters and brothers, these are my three thoughts on the Epiphany: the universality of the doctrine of human equality, a doctrine learned by the light of Christ, and transcendence. Our vision, like that of the magi, reaches beyond earthly horizons and beyond the stars as we draw close to the life of God, who came to enlighten us and make us truly happy.

Sisters and brothers, together with my dear brother, Father Robert Drinan, and with the wonderful priest who served well as interpreter, Father Ronald, we now approach the altar in representation of all the people. Let us not forget that this morning all of us—not just those approaching the altar but all the people whom we ministers of the altar represent—should carry in our hearts the sentiments of the magi: a great faith in the Christ we have found as a source of joy and hope. In our immense delight in having come to know Christ, we should commit to collaborating with him so that his kingdom, which began in the manger in Bethlehem and started its expansion to all corners of the earth with the adoration of the magi, will be recognized by everyone in our nation and in all the countries of the earth and so that El Salvador and all the world become the kingdom of God on earth. Let it be so.