

Advent

with St.

Oscar Romero

by Cameron Bellm

## Introduction

St. Óscar Romero is known as a courageous voice of resistance against the brutal violence that plagued his country, El Salvador, and against the dehumanizing scourges of poverty and inequality. In spite of all he witnessed, he never gave up on the hope of peace, reconciliation, and true change. He knew that his cries for justice would cost him his life, and they did. But he wasn't always so relentlessly bold.

Born in a small village in El Salvador in 1917, Óscar Romero became a priest in 1942 and lovingly and quietly served his people for over 20 years. In February 1977 he was the surprise choice for Archbishop of San Salvador, and effectively the Archbishop of the entire country. He was chosen largely because he was not expected to speak up about the deep socioeconomic inequality of the country and the increasingly vicious rule of the rich and powerful.

All of that changed on March 12, 1977, when Romero's friend and fellow priest Rutilio Grande was assassinated by government security forces for speaking out against their harassment and silencing of Catholic priests who stood in solidarity with the poor. From that day forward, Romero spoke loudly and clearly in defense of the impoverished, the oppressed, and the victims of El Salvador's violent regime. Although he was routinely accused of being a communist or siding with guerillas, Romero sided with no one but Jesus Christ. He denounced violence and preached instead the radical love and forgiveness of the gospel. In his final homily he pleaded with soldiers to disobey orders to kill. He was shot to death at the altar the very next day while celebrating mass. In an interview he gave not long before his death, Romero forgave and blessed in advance those he knew would kill him. He was canonized by Pope Francis on October 14, 2018.

At the center of Romero's preaching was this central belief: the gospel is not an antiquated fairytale, but is alive and breathing, right here in our present time and circumstances. It was not hard for him to see Christ crucified all around him in the suffering of his people, who bore the image of God. And his conviction that Christ comes to us at every moment in human history made it possible for him to see the hope of the resurrection all around him, even in spite of the terrible circumstances that filled his days.

Each week Romero broadcast his Sunday homily by radio, along with his report on the events of the week in light of the gospel. He had an enormous audience of listeners who believed, like he did, that the Church must not hold itself at a remove from current events, but instead must seek the face of the suffering Christ in every human being, and go forth in love to bring about justice.

Let's set the scene. The year is 1978. The last two national elections in El Salvador were marred by fraud, solidifying the power of a military-backed executive branch intent on crushing any resistance from the impoverished majority of the country. Paramilitary death squads violently repress any group or individual who speaks out against injustice. Disappearances and kidnappings are common occurrences, and torture is frequently carried out by government forces. Multiple priests have been threatened, deported, or killed. Romero faces frequent denunciations by the government, his own bishops, and the papal nuncio of El Salvador, who is set on removing him from office for his refusal to be silent in the face of violence and human

rights violations. The diocesan printing press, radio office, and Central American University in San Salvador have been bombed repeatedly. Advent draws near. The hope of the gospel buzzes in the air.

The year is 2023. A horrific war, rife with human rights abuses, is being waged in Gaza, with no signs of stopping. Hostages are held and casualties mount endlessly as more weapons are stockpiled and deployed. Another brutal war continues to batter Ukraine, and refugees desperately seek escape from the violence and destruction. At home in the United States, we face our own deadly plagues of violence, racism, and poverty. Wildfires have raged out of control this year, destroying homes and forests and making our air too toxic to breathe. Climate change continues to have the worst impact on the most vulnerable, those who depend for their lives on access to clean water and successful harvests. Advent draws near. The hope of the gospel buzzes in the air.

45 years and thousands of miles separate us. But the gospel unites us.

The readings that St. Óscar Romero preached on during Advent in 1978 are the same ones we will hear this year in 2023. We are fortunate to have the voice of this courageous saint reaching across time and space to lead us deeper into the Kingdom of God.

This devotional presents excerpts from Romero's homilies for the four Sundays of Advent and midnight mass on Christmas Day. They are excerpts because the homilies are very long. Each homily is covered in five short sections in this devotional, and I have offered meditative prayer suggestions for each one. There are no set days on which to use it— just come to the devotional and rest in it on whichever days you can. Ideally, you will hear the Scriptures on Sunday and then continue to dwell in them all week long as you turn to Romero's homilies. There is a bit of space for journaling, but it's certainly not required. This is your Advent. This is your devotional. Feel free to use it in any way that is nourishing to you.

I am very grateful to The Romero Trust for granting me permission to include excerpts from Romero's homilies. The full texts of the homilies (and even audio recordings for some of them) are available on their website ([www.romerotrusted.org.uk](http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk)). If you have a chance, I encourage you to read them in full or listen to them. Even if you do not speak Spanish, it is still a beautiful experience to hear the bold timbre of a great saint's voice.

May we spend this Advent drawing ever nearer to the mystery and the majesty of God. St. Óscar Romero, pray for us!

## First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

### Day 1

#### **Readings:**

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

#### **Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Advent, Time of Joyful Hope" (December 3, 1978)**

"Today is the Church's New Year. A new Liturgical Year begins today, the first Sunday of Advent. [...] Speaking about the Liturgical Year the Council states: 'Within the cycle of a year, moreover, she unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from the Incarnation and birth until the ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the coming of the Lord.'<sup>1</sup> These are the broad outlines of the paths that we are going to travel as we prepare for Christmas, as we reflect on the great mystery of the Incarnation and as we await the Redeemer who will come to save this world.

[...] we do not proclaim the gospel and Christ as an ordered theory but as a lived event which enlightens the reality of El Salvador, the realities of the week that has just passed and that was filled with events and injustices as well as some very beautiful moments. My sisters and brothers, we will try to imitate Saint Peter here, and therefore it should not be viewed as wrong that the Bishop uses the chair of the gospel to preach the gospel. But in preaching the gospel I do not speak about a non-incarnated gospel, but one that is incarnated and that enlightens the realities of our time. Who among you does not long for the Word of the gospel that enlightens the death of our beloved brother, Father Ernesto Barrera?<sup>2</sup> I must speak such a word! Who among you does not long for a word about the men from Holland and England who were abducted in our country?<sup>3</sup> I must also speak about this! This does not mean that I am putting aside the gospel in order to meddle in politics. Rather, like Saint Peter, I am bringing the gospel to the realities that I have just mentioned in order to illuminate these realities.

The title for my homily today is Advent, the time of joyful hope. Based on today's Biblical readings, I have the opportunity to preach about the sentiments that Christians should have during this time of Advent. This is why the Church preaches—to provide a Christian orientation and to Christianize the life of those persons who listen to the Word. I do not presume to do anything else, for I am simply a preacher of the Word of God, and I know that the success of this preaching lies in you: in the good will of those who receive the message of God and attempt to give life to this Word. I also try to live these four weeks of Advent, this time of preparation for the Nativity, with an attitude of joyful hope and at the same time try to clothe myself in the virtues that the Word of God highlights: first, poverty and hunger for God; second, vigilance and faith; third, Christian presence and action in the world. This is Advent! This is the message of

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 102.

<sup>2</sup> Father Ernesto Barrera and three companions were killed by the National Guard on November 28, 1978. Archbishop Romero presided at their funeral just four days before giving this homily.

<sup>3</sup> Abductions and kidnappings were common occurrences during this time in El Salvador.

joyful hope that is communicated to us during Advent! As you can see, the Word of the Gospel brings us joy and optimism without separating us from the difficult realities in which we find ourselves. In the heart of the Christian there is joy, there is hope and there is strength. Nothing can take away this joyful waiting for the Lord.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. In these tremendously difficult days, we are all aching for something new. Take a quiet moment with God to welcome this liturgical year that begins today. Offer to God all that you are carrying into the new year from the one that has just passed. Let yourself rest in the knowledge that God carries it all with you, mourns what you mourn, and sustains you with hope for a better future.
  
2. A vital theme in Romero’s homilies is that Jesus is incarnated in our present history, our current reality. Far from being something separate and isolated from the world in which we live, the gospel illuminates it—sorrow and joy exist side by side. Reflect on the events of your life this past week, both personally and more broadly—the news you have read, the situations that shape your country and the globe. Can you bring the light of the gospel to shine on them? As you set forth this Advent, ask God to draw your heart to the specific places and circumstances in this world where you can bring this hope-filled light. Make this your prayer for the four weeks to come.

## First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

### Day 2

#### **Readings:**

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

#### **Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Advent, Time of Joyful Hope" (December 3, 1978)**

"Advent is a call to clothe ourselves in a spirit of poverty and hunger for God! Advent, the time of preparation for the Nativity, is a time of conversion. Those who enter this process of conversion are looking for God. But how are people going to look for God if they do not realize that they have a need for God? People do not desire freedom unless they realize that they are enchained or enslaved to some situation. People do not desire liberation unless they realize they are oppressed. Therefore, poverty is the following: When we speak of the Church of the poor, we are not using Marxist dialectic, as though there were another church of the rich. What we are saying is that Christ, inspired by the Spirit of God, declared: 'The Lord has sent me to proclaim glad tidings to the poor'—words of the Bible— 'so that to hear him one must become poor' (Luke 4:18). The poverty of Advent resides in a hunger for God. The poor hunger, and the hunger that Advent leads us to is that which we heard in the first reading. [...]

Read the whole of chapter sixty-three and sixty-four [of Isaiah], where we find the beautiful prayers—and today's reading contains only a small fragment of this prayer: 'You, Lord, are our father, our redeemer you are named forever. Why do you let us wander, O Lord, from your way, and harden our hearts so that we fear you not? Return for the sake of your servants the tribes of your heritage' (Isaiah 63:16b-17). What follows is a prayer that is very proper for the liturgy of Advent: 'Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, with the mountain quaking before you' (Isaiah 64:1). This is the meaning of hunger for God. The person who feels the emptiness of hunger for God is the opposite of the self-sufficient person. In this sense, rich means the proud, rich means even the poor who have no property but who think they need nothing, not even God. This is the wealth that is abominable in God's eyes, what the humble but forceful Virgin speaks of: 'The rich he has sent away empty'—those who think they have everything—'The hungry he has filled with good things' (Luke 1:53)—those who have need of God.

My sisters and brothers, this is the first virtue of Advent. Indeed, this virtue is very appropriate as we prepare for Christmas, and therefore I beg you, let us try to empty ourselves of self-sufficiency. We have to await the gift of Christmas not from the richness of the world but from the only one who is rich: God who comes to fill the emptiness that cannot be filled by all the gifts of Christmas when the heart is filled with pride and vanity. Let us examine our hearts to see if we have these sentiments of the poor, to see if we are truly honoring the Church of the poor—the poor who hunger for God, the poor who feel that without God everything is empty and impure. [...]

The second reading speaks to us about the motive for this hope, this hunger for God. Why do we wait for everything to come from God? Is this some kind of alienation, like the materialists who criticize us and say: you do not struggle here on earth because you are waiting for everything to come from God? No! We work here, but we wait for everything to come from God because, as Saint Paul has reminded us today, the Lord is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9). Everything comes from there, from above: life, intelligence, the qualities of persons who can make the country a better place, the intelligence that many desire to destroy and oppress, the intelligence that many want to use in order to enrich themselves and who have no interest in becoming instruments of God who contribute to the joy and happiness of others. Therefore, the first virtue of this season of Advent is an attitude of waiting for everything to come from God but at the same time to have an attitude of dedicated work and of making our contribution in the way that human beings must do.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Poverty of spirit is one of the hardest virtues to grasp, much less to put into practice. Take a few moments to simply speak aloud or in your heart your desire for God. Take note of all the areas in your life in which you feel distracted or disconnected from the Divine. Offer them wholeheartedly to God and pray for an unceasing hunger for sacred communion, deep and meaningful connection with the Creator.
  
2. There is a famous quote attributed sometimes to St. Augustine and sometimes to St. Ignatius that reminds us of the vital partnership between prayer and work: “Pray as if everything depends on God, work as if everything depends on you.” Romero reminds us of the value of placing all our hope in God while continuing to partner with God in the great work of redemption of all creation. In which area do you feel like your strength lies at this moment? If in prayer, ask God to direct you to meaningful action to accompany it. If in action, ask God to lead your heart to prayer, to strengthen your hands for your work.

## First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

### Day 3

#### **Readings:**

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

#### **Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Advent, Time of Joyful Hope" (December 3, 1978)**

"We call these weeks of preparation for the feast of the Nativity the time of Advent because the spirit of this season is awaiting that which will come, the One who will come. In today's reading Saint Paul tells us that we are preparing ourselves for this coming (1 Corinthians 1:7-8). Advent reminds us of the first coming of Christ that was foretold by the prophets of the Old Testament, who proclaimed that God would come in suffering and humility to save all people. Advent gathers up all the passages of the Old Testament and speaks directly to people's hunger for God and the hopes of the prophet: Hopefully you will come, O Lord, to save your people. Advent is a celebration of the coming of salvation that Jesus accomplished twenty centuries ago—but this salvation is not history but is the future. Advent also signifies the second coming of Christ when he will come to judge, when he will begin his work.

Here in the Church we are working to make the Kingdom of God a reality. Everyone who struggles for justice, everyone who makes just claims in unjust surroundings is working for God's Kingdom, even though not a Christian. The Church does not comprise God's entire Kingdom; God's Kingdom goes beyond the Church's boundaries. The Church values everything that is in harmony with her struggle to set up God's Kingdom. A Church that tries to keep itself pure and uncontaminated would not be a Church of God's service to people. The authentic Church is one that does not mind conversing with prostitutes and publicans and sinners, as Christ did (Mark 2:16)—and with Marxists and members of the Bloc and those of various political movements—in order to bring them salvation's true message.<sup>4</sup> Jesus came to save people in whatever situation he found them. Jesus wants to go out to all the crossroads, to the churches and to all Christians who await the final judgment, the consummation of history when the new heaven and the new earth will be created (Isaiah 65:17), where there will be no more injustices because the Lord will speak the final word.

Vigilance and faith, a vigilance that makes Christ who is operating in the new heaven present in the midst of this world. Christians are not people who wait for everything at some future time, but Christians know that for twenty centuries Christ is at work in the midst of humanity, and, if men and women accept Christ, then they become these new women and men that society needs so that the world can be organized according to the heart of God."

---

<sup>4</sup> The Bloc was a revolutionary coalition formed in response to government repression.



## *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Pause for a moment to reflect on the fact that Jesus came “in suffering and humility” to reach all people. Every Advent we remember and celebrate the inauspicious circumstances in which the Son of God was born. But over time it is easy to lose our grasp on the radical poverty and humility that Jesus embraced, the very real suffering he endured. Take comfort in knowing that however you suffer, you are united to the suffering of Christ. Take comfort in knowing that however lowly you feel, Jesus meets you there.

2. Romero reminds us that the work of God takes place both inside the Church and beyond it. Where can you see the redemptive work of restoration taking place outside your immediate community? For twenty centuries Christ has been at work in humanity. Rest in the fact that in spite of all our darkness, we have never been alone. Thank God for all the moments in your life when you have acutely felt that companionship of the Divine.

## First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

Day 4

### Readings:

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Advent, Time of Joyful Hope" (December 3, 1978)

"The [Vatican] Council solemnly states that the restoration of the world has begun: from the time that Christ came and brought the life of God that he inserted into the heart of history, the divine leaven has been placed in humanity. Blessed are those who find this divine gift and incorporate themselves into this gift. It is for this reason, my sisters and brothers, that it is repugnant that a Church that tries to become present among the sins and errors of the present world should be criticized. Some want to keep the gospel so disembodied that it does not get involved at all in the world it must save. Christ is now in history. Christ is in the womb of the people. Christ is now bringing about the new heaven and the new earth (Isaiah 65:17), and the work of Advent is involved in this vigilance and faith: to discover the fact that Christ is continually coming. Advent is not just four weeks of preparation for Christmas. Advent is the Church's life. Advent is Christ's presence as he uses his preachers, his priests, his catechists, his Catholic schools, all the effort meant to bring about God's true reign, telling humanity that Isaiah's prophecy is now fulfilled: Emmanuel—God-with-us! (Isaiah 7:14)

Within this framework of faith, an experience of the presence of Christ, I invite all of you who are participating in the Mass in this Cathedral and living as a Christian community to grow in your faith. Indeed, it is for this reason that we come to Mass and participate in the liturgy of the Church, because the liturgy is nothing more than making present the mystery of Christ through the sacraments and the liturgical life. When the Church speaks about the Liturgical year, she states: 'In the course of the year the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ from the Incarnation and nativity to the ascension, to Pentecost and the expectation of the blessed hope of the coming of the Lord ... so that these are in some way made present for all time.'<sup>5</sup> This is similar to our celebration of September 15th, when we remember the events of 1821, a date which is part of our history. September 15th is nothing more than a remembrance.<sup>6</sup> The liturgy, however, is not history and is not simply an act of remembering. The liturgy makes the whole mystery of Christ present.<sup>7</sup> For example, for us as Catholics, this time of Advent signifies that the Spirit of Christ, who came to save the world, wants to make present his hope and strength among the people of El Salvador. Today the Lord *can* save us because his saving mystery is made present among us, and we simply need to learn how to take advantage of this presence. [...]

---

<sup>5</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 102.

<sup>6</sup> On September 15, 1821 El Salvador, along with four other Central American nations, gained its independence from Spain.

<sup>7</sup> *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

Through the sacraments Christ is present in his Church, and this is one of the spiritual matrixes of this time of Advent—being vigilant for that day when the Lord will come. Perhaps it is better to say it this way: we discover that Christ lived among us, but we did not know him. We discover that what you did for one of these least sisters or brothers of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:40). How close is this Christ and how few have known him! Advent should admonish us to discover the face of Christ in each brother or sister that we greet, in each friend whose hand we shake, in each beggar who asks for bread, in each worker who wants to exercise the right to join a union, and in each *campesino* who looks for work in the coffee groves.<sup>8</sup> Then it would not be possible to rob them, to cheat them, to deny them their rights. They are Christ, and whatever is done to them Christ will take as done to himself. This is what Advent is, namely, Christ living among us.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Romero reminds us so beautifully of the extratemporal nature of God. The Nativity is not something that happened once and receded into the annals of history. It is something that is present with us in every moment, just like the Crucifixion and the Resurrection. We live every moment of salvation history in every moment of human history—God carries too much mystery to fit neatly into time as we know it. Where can you see the gentle humility, the loving power of God in your time? Where can you see Jesus suffering, and where can you see Jesus resurrected?
  
2. What an incredible challenge of love Romero offers us in this homily: an invitation to see the suffering face of Christ in every human being we encounter, a reminder that the way we treat others is the way we treat Jesus. Where is it easy for you to see the image of God in others? Where is it hard? Take some time to examine your conscience, asking God to reveal to you the places where you have not seen and honored the breath of the Divine in others. Ask for the grace and forgiveness to move forward in love.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Campesinos* were agricultural laborers, people who lived in poverty under the oppression of wealthy landowners.

## First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2020

### Day 5

#### **Readings:**

Isaiah 63:16-17; 64:3-6

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:33-37

#### **Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Advent, Time of Joyful Hope" (December 3, 1978)**

"Finally, my sisters and brothers, Advent is the presence of Christians in the world. Let us not forget that we celebrate the Incarnation. We celebrate the infinite loving gesture of God, who so loved the world that he sent his own Word, his own Son to become man in the womb of Mary (John 3:16). Mary should be one of the central figures during Advent. Thanks to this pure woman, God found the womb of a holy woman where the Word of God could become man.

But notice, Christ became a man of his people and of his time. He lived as a Jew, he worked as a laborer of Nazareth, and since then he continues to become incarnate in everyone. If many have distanced themselves from the Church, it is precisely because the Church has somewhat estranged itself from humanity. But a Church that can feel as its own all that is human and wants to incarnate the pain, the hope, the affliction of all who suffer and feel joy, such a Church will be the Christ who is loved and awaited, Christ present. And all of this depends on us. [...]

Advent is a call that tells us that, even though the world is depraved, people can live that intimate happiness that the Lord has given them and can give testimony to Christ in the midst of a corrupt society. Before a world that is in need of evident social transformation, how could we not ask Christians to incarnate the justice of Christianity and live this justice in their homes and their lives? How could we not ask Christians to be agents of change and become new women and men? Medellín states: 'It would be useless to change structures if there were not new women and men to direct these structures.'<sup>9</sup> [...] if structures are changed, if there is agrarian reform, but if we are going to direct these reforms with the same selfish attitude, then we will simply have a new group of wealthy people, new situations of abuse and new violators. It is not enough to simply change structures, but rather we must ask if this reality is Christian, is this reality in accord with the mind of the Lord? Please understand that the change that the Church proclaims has its starting point in the heart of humankind—new women and men who know how to be a leaven for a new society. [...]

I invite you to enter into this Advent, into this time of spiritual preparation for Christmas with this sense that I have spoken about: a hunger for God. Let us become poor in spirit and in need of God. Let us be watchful and attentive to the presence of God in the poor, in our friends, in our sisters and brothers, so that we treat these people in the same way that we would treat Christ. As

---

<sup>9</sup> Romero refers here to the documents published by the Second General Episcopal Conference of Latin America, 1968. *Medellín*, 1,3.

Christians, let us bring a committed presence to our society where we are called to be the heralds of the Kingdom of God! So be it!”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. How can we incarnate the justice of God? How can we stand in solidarity with all who are suffering? Reflect on this call, sifting through your life and your interaction with the world around you. Where can you make visible the heart of Jesus? Where can you be Christ’s hands and feet? We are all so overwhelmed in these challenging days, but we can all, in ways both large and small, be bringers of the light.
  
2. Alongside our actions to bring about justice, we are also called simultaneously to the continuous conversion of our hearts. Take some time to examine yours. Where are the places in your life where you have grown too comfortable, the places where the mighty bell of the gospel needs to be rung? Where are there attitudes or habits that are due for change, for the gentle restorative touch of Jesus? Who are the people in your life that you do not treat as you would treat Jesus? Allow God to lead you to repentance and restoration.

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

### Day 1

#### **Readings:**

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

#### **Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Lord Comes: Let Us Prepare His Way" (December 10, 1978)**

"This message of God is based on Sacred Scripture and the language of the Church that becomes her lived prayer—prayer that is called liturgy. During these weeks of preparation for the Nativity, the liturgy fills us with hope and joy. Last Sunday we said that Advent was a time of joyful waiting. Today the Sacred Liturgy begins with a cry of joy and hope: Let us go out to meet the Lord! The Lord is coming! In our prayer we ask God to remove all the obstacles that might hinder our ability to encounter God.

In my homily I will develop the following three ideas: First, the coming of God; Second, the paths on which God comes to women and men; Third, Christ is the way.

The fact that God comes to save us is the liturgical meaning of the Word that gives unity and depth to this time of preparation for the feast of the Nativity, this season that is called Advent (the coming, the preparation for an encounter). Who, at some time, has not had this experience of Advent, this experience of preparing to receive a friend, a son or daughter, a spouse or a parent who is coming from a distant place? One prepares the home and gets ready to welcome the person with a warm and cordial celebration (the more one loves the person, the warmer the celebration). This gives us insight into what the Church wishes to achieve during this time, namely, a warm preparation.

God comes to save us—this is the theological meaning that is expressed by the Second Vatican Council when the bishops refer to the dignity of the human person [...] The Council states: 'the dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God.'<sup>10</sup> Saint Augustine, a great humanist, said: 'You have created us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.' There is a mutual attraction between the God who created us for himself and men and women who have been gifted with intelligence, freedom, and many abilities that must not be abused but used to discover their fullness in the One who is the objective of their nature, the One who is the beginning and the end of their being."

---

<sup>10</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 19.



## Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

Day 2

### Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Lord Comes: Let Us Prepare His Way" (December 10, 1978)

"This Sunday the three readings provide Christians with a spiritual framework for this season of Advent and speak to us about the fact that the destiny of the human person corresponds to God's desire. When the hearts of people express noble and intimate sentiments, they demand respect for their dignity as images of God. Then...there is a desire to belong to God, and they are not satisfied until they find themselves with God who also desires to encounter women and men.

The first reading refers to the final days of the Babylonian exile. These chapters are called Second Isaiah—an anonymous prophet who was inspired by the hopes of Isaiah and who saw God's punishment of the people as drawing to a close. The time of exile will come to an end and people will return to their homeland. Listen to this command of the Lord: 'Comfort, give comfort to my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim her service is at an end, her guilt is expiated. A voice cries out: in the desert prepare the way of the Lord' (Isaiah 40:1-2a, 3). Then the prophet describes this procession of people as an epiphany, a revelation of God who shines forth in the arid desert, in the journey of the people who return from exile, in the people who rejoice as they find themselves once again in their homeland.

The Bedouins of the desert, like the Eastern poets, say that when the winds of the desert produce a strange sound it appears to be a cry, a human cry. They ask a question and then answer their own question: *Do you hear, my sisters and brothers, how the wind cries out? The desert is sad and cries out because it wants to be a fertile meadow.* [...] This was Isaiah's experience and what he wanted to express when he referred to the transformation of the arid desert into a garden: the hope of a people who returned from slavery and the punishment of oppression—the arms of freedom, and the joy of experiencing oneself as a member of a worthy and an autonomous people.

The first reading presents us with a redemptive meaning. The prophet says that all of this occurred because of the sins, the idolatries, the social injustices, and the abuses of the kings who held power. Thus, God has punished his people, but the prophet adds: God is satisfied (Isaiah 40:2). Even though they are sinners, God does not delight in making people suffer. God wants people to experience the joy and happiness that God alone is able to give to people and that cannot be found in the realities of the world. God is jealous and desires to fill the hearts of people with joy—therefore, when people separate themselves from God they experience an emptiness."



## *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Reflect on the places in your life where you feel the most satisfied, whether it be in relationships, in work, in creative or athletic pursuits. Acknowledge these gifts of God, and offer thanks for them. Ask for the sensitivity of spirit to recognize that wherever there is joy, wherever there is peace, there is God.

2. Reflect, too, on the places where you feel most empty, most far from God. Sit with the knowledge that God wants to bring about redemption and restoration, regardless of our many failings. Open yourself to receiving it.

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

Day 3

### Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Lord Comes: Let Us Prepare His Way" (December 10, 1978)

"The second reading, taken from Saint Peter's letters, orients us with regard to the encounter with God. In modern terms Saint Paul tells us not to confuse theological nearness with cosmological nearness. Let me explain this. During the time of the Apostles there was a great concern: people wanted to know if the promised coming of Christ to judge the world was near at hand—would they see the second coming of Christ? When these people died, many of their generation were afflicted because their enemies laughed at them: *Poor demons! Waiting for a hope that was never realized!* Saint Peter writes to them to strengthen their hope: 'Be patient! With the Lord one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day!' (2 Peter 3:8).

Chronological categories of time have no meaning for God. God gives great consideration to a deep concern: 'Be patient because the patient waiting for God is a time for the children of God to change their ways' (2 Peter 3:9). God desires to encounter women and men. This might occur at a very late stage in one's life, when one's life has passed, and now in old age all that remains is the rotten fruit of youthful years that were lived with no thought of tomorrow. Yet God is still waiting patiently for this person. This encounter can also occur during the time of one's youth, and we have examples of young women and men who have found happiness in their God. In summary, for God time is like the comparison of a thousand years to one day. For God there is something more important—namely, his saving work, his encounter with women and men, regardless of whether these people are young or old or children, regardless of whether this happens at the present time or later at some future time. God hopes that the family that he created and placed in this world will share happiness, joy, and divine life with him: 'You, Lord, created us to be yours!'<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the second reading speaks to us about the destiny of humanity and all nations as a movement toward a new heaven and a new earth, so that in this way people do not remain on their knees adoring the gods of this earth, gods that consume their whole lives. [...] what exists in time has a relative value—it will eventually pass away. Only the new heaven and the new earth that God has promised—only these will form the true paradise. It is in the new heaven and the new earth that God's definitive encounter with humanity will take place. We are journeying toward the new heaven and the new earth! Here on this earth we must make this encounter a part of our own lives, an encounter that occurs in our own hearts and in our own homes—and it should be God whom we encounter in these places.

---

<sup>11</sup> This quote also comes from St. Augustine.

My beloved sisters and brothers, may those who might give prophetic eloquence to my words, may they be shaken from their passivity and no longer kneel down before the idols of this world. Here I refer to those who have made idols out of the goods of this earth, those who want gold, money, land, power and politics to be their ultimate destiny. Where does all of this lead a person? This will only end with the boast of having been a person involved in politics or a person who had a large amount of money. But the question remains: has one been faithful to the will of God? A person must know how to live in the midst of the passing realities of this earth and live according to God's will. The realities of this world should not be made into absolutes because there is only one absolute, and that is the One who is waiting to meet us in the new heaven and the new earth that will not pass away. [...]"

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. I can't tell you that the world looks very hopeful right now. I can't tell you that I see the new heaven and the new earth just up around the bend. But our faith continually invites us into both stubborn belief and dedicated action. Offer your impatience to God. Open your life to be a channel of God's mercy.
  
2. Romero speaks of the idols we worship, and, although many of us are not wealthy or politically powerful, we still have our own golden calves, the things we cling to. Meditate on your idols and ask for the Holy Spirit to illuminate them for you, whatever they may be. Ask God to give you the desire to lay them down. If you have time, pray the beautiful Suscipe prayer written by St. Ignatius of Loyola or the Litany of Humility.

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

Day 4

### Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Lord Comes: Let Us Prepare His Way" (December 10, 1978)

"I want to respond to another question: what paths will God use to enter history? On which paths will we concretely encounter this God who comes to save? On which crossroads, on which dead end streets will El Salvador find salvation in God? Or are people going to laugh at us as they laughed at the Christians to whom Saint Peter wrote his letter? No, my sisters and brothers, this is not some illusion! God is coming, and his paths are near to us. God saves in history. Each person's history and each person's life is the place where we meet God. How satisfying to know that people do not have to go to the desert to meet him, nor do they have to travel to some specific place in the world! God is in our hearts! Jesus said: 'The Kingdom of God is within you' (Luke 17:21). The paths of God are the paths of history, the concrete paths of our national life, our family life and our personal life.

It is beautiful to read Isaiah's description concerning the paths of Israel: Where will God meet this poor, humiliated, exiled and oppressed people—oppressed by invaders who took away their freedom and made them captives? Who would have believed that on the very paths along which the invaders traveled to humiliate the people of the Holy Land, the People of God would travel triumphantly, singing: I rejoiced when they said to me, 'Let us go up to the house of the Lord?' (Psalm 122:1) [...]

Historians tell us that during the time of Isaiah, when the image of a god or when an emperor or a king would enter the city, the roads were prepared in the same way that today the highways are repaired for the visit of an important person. Isaiah is using this image when he says: 'Make straight in the wasteland a highway for our God! Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill shall be made low; the rugged land shall be made a plain, the rough country a broad valley. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed' (Isaiah 40:4-5) [...] The path on which God encounters people is the path of their own lives—for this reason it is called the path of life. Thus, the way in which people conduct their lives is most important. If we walk along the paths of evil, then we are not headed in the direction to encounter God. If, however, our conduct is in accord with the law and the will of God, then we are encountering God. The encounter with God and with people will be the same. The way people create the history of El Salvador determines how people will encounter God. If our history moves along the paths of evil, if injustice abounds and our country becomes materialistic, then these are not the paths of the Lord. 'Make straight the paths of the Lord' is the voice of Advent, the voice of the prophets whose words are echoed by John the Baptist, the last of the prophets: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths' (Mark 1:2).

The person of John is presented to us as a way, a path—indeed, he is a man who becomes a path. In fact, this is what each Christian should become: a person who becomes a path, a light, a witness.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Óscar Romero wrote this homily during a watershed moment in the history of El Salvador. We are in a similar watershed moment nationally and globally. Racism, violence, and injustice abound, while so many suffer from poverty, oppression, and war. You, too, are called to become a path for the Lord in your time. Looking at the world around you, ask God to reveal an area where you can do that. The gospel calls us to responsibility for each other, on both an individual and a systemic scale. Allow your heart to be engaged. Allow your life to become a light.
  
2. What a deep comfort that God comes to us in the midst of our human history, in the midst of our individual lives. We need not escape from our tragic historic or personal circumstances—God is right in the midst of them. For all the places where you see Christ suffering in the world around you, look, too, for the places where you can see the hope of resurrection. Rest in the knowledge that God is not some far-away disembodied concept, but is actually *right here*. Practice this week looking at the circumstances of your life and asserting in the midst of them the phrase “the presence of God.”

## Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2020

Day 5

### Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-5, 9-11

2 Peter 3:8-14

Mark 1:1-8

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Lord Comes: Let Us Prepare His Way" (December 10, 1978)

"My third thought is about Christ. Christ is the great path and the encounter with God. Before concluding with this thought, I want to pause here because, yes—our lives and the history of our people are the concrete paths on which God is coming forth today, during this year of 1978, to save the people of El Salvador. Therefore, it is necessary to know these paths. For this reason, I am always concerned that the preaching of the gospel be incarnated in reality and illuminate the realities of the week. What I do here is simply give you an example of how we must make every effort to meditate on the Word of God: I give you an example, but I am very aware of the complexity of our history and that often my perspective here is very incomplete—indeed, each family and every one of us as individuals has our own history. Therefore, in light of the gospel that is the only reality that illuminates and saves, each family has to enlighten the history of their own home and their own conscience. [...]

We conclude our homily by inviting you to move spiritually toward the altar where my third thought becomes a reality. In the gospel Saint Mark does not presume to present us with a life of Christ. Rather he tells us: here with us is God who became man. It is the only gospel that begins with the words: 'the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ the Son of God' (Mark 1:1). When Christ the Son of God came into this world, people experienced that all the paths of their lives and all the paths of history had been joined to this one great path: 'I am the way ... no one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6). There is salvation in Christ.

The three readings speak to us about Christ, whom the prophets, in the midst of catastrophe, proclaimed to be the Savior. The second reading refers to the nearness of his coming but also speaks about this time of waiting for the conversion of women and men. According to the profound theology of Saint Mark, Christ himself is present among us. Let us meet Christ because He is not far away. Christ lives among his people. God saves in the midst of history, and Christ is in that place where God meets every person. To encounter Christ is to encounter God. To place the hope of the nation in Christ is to say that God comes to save us. So be it!"



## Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

### Day 1

#### Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

#### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us" (December 17, 1978)

"Let us try to make concrete the spirit of the season of Advent that began three weeks ago—let us make this spirit concrete by focusing on three attitudes: one, faith and vigilance: the Lord draws near and we want to encounter him. We feel that the Lord is near, and we need faith in order to experience this nearness of God; two, spiritual hunger and poverty: people have no desire to eat when they are not hungry. People also have no need for God when they are proud and/or self-sufficient. Only the poor, only those who are hungry can be satisfied. This is the spirit of poverty that we saw in Mary, the Virgin whose hymn we sang today as our responsorial psalm. In the name of humanity she expresses the need for God and a hunger for God—this same need and hunger that we experience. Blessed are those who see the coming of Christmas in the same way that those who are hungry see the gift of food. People cannot desire liberation or freedom unless they are conscious of being enslaved. Three, finally, we refer to a positive attitude of presence and mission in the world. This missionary virtue or attitude makes present the divine that the world needs.

In our reflection today I want to highlight this third attitude of presence. I do this because the readings that we have just heard highlight the mystery of the Incarnation, which we now celebrate. The Incarnation is a mystery that gives meaning, unity, and an aura of mystique to this waiting for the feast of the Nativity. The Nativity cannot be understood if we do not have faith in the great mystery of the Incarnation. This Incarnation is the celebration of the presence of God in the midst of the realities of the world, the celebration of God who becomes man in the person of the one called the Christ.

This is the theme of today's homily with the words of the Gospel: 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us' (John 1:14). I will develop it as usual in three points: first, Christ is the Word of God who became flesh; second, the Church prolongs in history the mystery of Christ's Incarnation; third, God became man so that we might become like God. [...]

Today Saint Paul speaks to us and exhorts us to make ourselves worthy of the definitive encounter with Christ. He announces an existence beyond history that will have no end. In this case we see a reference to Christ who as God has no beginning—he was. As we see in the beautiful prologue of Saint John's gospel: 'in the beginning was the Word' (John 1:1). Note the past tense of the verb: was—he existed. In the beginning, when God put things into motion, the Word existed, the Word was. Now Saint Paul tells us: when your life ends, when your history ends, when the history of humanity ends, may you be worthy to encounter this eternal river that



is Christ so that you might continue to live for all eternity. Thus it is that history is nothing more than a fragment that has a beginning and will eventually end, but Christ, as God, is the Lord of history because he existed before history and will exist after the world ends. He had no beginning and will have no end. This is the Word that becomes man. This is the Incarnation that becomes flesh.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. On this Gaudete Sunday, the joy of Christmas draws near, when we will celebrate not only that Jesus was born to us, but that through the mystery of creation and incarnation, He is with us always, beyond the limited conceptions of time our human minds can grasp. Dwell for a little while on the people in your life who remind you of the presence of Jesus, whether personal friends or family members, or writers, artists, or activists. Thank God for their light. Rest in it and allow it to fill you with peace.
2. Romero speaks here of the poverty that draws us to long for God. Where do you see that poverty of spirit, that unabashed need for God in your life? Contrarily, where do you see yourself trying to make do on your own, not allowing yourself to rely on God? Take a few moments to reflect on spiritual poverty and self-sufficiency. Are there things in your life on which you can loosen your grip? Are there places where you can ask for God’s help? Make an offering of them to our God of compassion and mercy.

## Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

### Day 2

#### Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

#### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us" (December 17, 1978)

“Saint John uses another word of great biblical significance, the Greek word *flesh*. (John 1:14). Flesh refers to a concrete human person, and flesh is all of us who are here this morning: men and women in whom one is able to see the marks of the years that have passed, children who are beginning their lives, strong young people, and elderly women and men who are in the final phase of their lives. The flesh is being marked by the passing days. Flesh is also the concrete situation of the human person, the person in sin, the person in anguish because of his/her present situation, the person of this country with a history that seems to have placed so many people on a dead-end street. Flesh is all those persons who are being encountered. Flesh! This fragile flesh! This flesh that has a beginning and that will eventually end, that becomes ill and dies, that sins, that becomes sad and happy according to the way in which people obey God—this is what the Word of God became. Yes, the Word of God became flesh.

One day we explained here a word that I tried to analyze: *kenosis*. Remember, *kenosis* is humiliation, anonymity, disappearance and disintegration. This word expresses an act of humility by God who is infinite and eternal and who placed himself in the womb of the virgin to become flesh. The child that we are going to adore in Bethlehem is flesh, the fragile flesh of a child. But in the fragile flesh, like a wrapped package, there is a great gift: the Word becomes flesh! The most beautiful aspect of Christ is not in his flesh but in the fact that without flesh there is no Christ. In flesh Christ wants to take on all that is implied in our flesh, for as we read in Saint Paul's theology: he became like us in all things except sin. [...]

We cry tears of joy and gratitude to know that this infinite God became flesh like you and I and dwells among us. If Christ would have accomplished his Incarnation today, if today he were a man of thirty years and were here in the Cathedral, we would not be able to distinguish him from anyone else. Jesus, a man of thirty years, a *campesino* from Nazareth, present here in the Cathedral like any other *campesino* from our villages—this was the Son of God who became flesh and we did not know him—a man completely like us. [...]

Mary cannot be forgotten during this season of Advent and Christmas. No one teaches us like Mary, the spirit of adoration before Christ who is the Word of God made flesh. No one else experienced in her womb the presence of the Word who became flesh. In the name of all human flesh she offers the Word her womb where Christ became incarnate in order to assume in himself, as the Council recently told us, the hands of all workers, the mind of all intellectuals, the hopes of all people, the hearts of all those who love, the anguish of all those who suffer, and the

joys of all people.<sup>12</sup> Nothing human is foreign to Jesus Christ because he has become flesh and has desired to assume in his dignity as the Son of God all that is implied by the flesh.

My sisters and brothers, during the days of Christmas I invite you to prolong this meditation: who is this child that is born in Bethlehem? Instead of thinking about gifts and banquets, greeting cards and other things that can consume our time, again I invite you to make this meditation: who is this child that is born in Bethlehem? This is the primary aspect of this Christmas season. Let us not allow this time to be commercialized and profaned. Let us embrace this season with a respectful spirit and venerate this mystery in our homes and in our poverty. The poorer and more infirm we are, the better we are able to reflect on this mystery. I am the flesh that Christ has assumed. Blessed be God who desired to become part of my life and become flesh like me.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. I love that Romero dwells so deeply here on the word “flesh,” that element that binds us all in our humanity, and binds us to Christ through the Incarnation. As you go about your day today, try to pay extra attention to your body—try to see it as a locus of wonder. Feel your muscles stretching and contracting. Place your hand on your chest and watch it rise and fall with your every breath. Rest your fingers on your wrist and feel the blood moving through your body in a steady and holy pulse. Jesus assumed all of these things into himself in the Incarnation, and he sanctified them all. Our relationships with our bodies are often difficult. But try today to see your body as something holy, as a gift, as something bearing the mark of the Divine.
  
2. Romero also gives us a much-needed call to simplicity and purity of heart during this busy season. There are gifts to be wrapped, special meals to be planned and prepared, decorations to hang, cards to be sent. In spite of our best intentions to have a slow and meaningful Advent, we all end up stressed and overwhelmed at times. Make it your prayer this week to hear the higher note that calls you to Jesus. If you can, set aside a time to rest with God. If not, invite God in to all of your tasks. God will surely meet you there.

---

<sup>12</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

## Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

Day 3

### Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us" (December 17, 1978)

"The marvelous event of the Incarnation is not something that simply occurred twenty centuries ago. What is beautiful about the Incarnation is the fact that Christ desired to prolong this mystery in his Church. [...]

Let us realize that this Church is the flesh of Christ, and, as we said before, this Church is flesh that is in a concrete situation of sin. We should not be surprised that we have to draw attention to the hierarchy and the priests and married people who call themselves Christian—that we must draw their attention to being holy because they are the body of Christ. I say we should not be surprised that in all the human elements of the Church there exists sin because flesh is in need of conversion and turning again toward the living God. Christ became flesh in order to redeem all flesh. The Church, the flesh of Christ in history, is in need of redemption at all times. In 1978 the bishops, priests and faithful—all people—need redemption. We are unworthy flesh! We are fragile flesh! We are the flesh of Christ in history! No one of us can say that we will throw the first stone because we are all sinners. For this reason, we say that the Church needs courage to denounce the sins of the world—not because she is spotless, but because those who denounce the sins of others must also be willing to be denounced. Indeed, the Church has an obligation to change her ways, and, as we heard from Saint Paul today, we also have an obligation to open ourselves to being corrected by God. [...]

I invite you this week, in this hour when El Salvador seems to have to pray for joy, to listen to Saint Paul repeat to us: 'Rejoice always! Pray without ceasing! In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Jesus Christ' (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). The Christian, [and] the Christian community, must not despair. If someone dies in the family, we need not weep like people without hope. If the skies have darkened our nation's history, let us not lose hope. We are a community of hope, and, like the Israelites in Babylon, let us hope for the hour of liberation. It will come. It will come because, as Saint Paul says, God is faithful. This joy must be like a prayer: 'the one who calls you is faithful and he will also accomplish it' (1 Thessalonians 5:24)."

## *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. What a mystery, that we are both flawed humans *and* the living body of Christ. Take this time to bring to God all the disappointment you have felt with the Church and its members, both on a large and small scale. We are all imperfect, and so, too, is the Church. God is not afraid to meet us in our sorrow. Let the Holy Spirit lead you into prayer for the Church, gently reminding you of the redemptive mercy of God. Open your heart and ask God to show you what your part is in the work of restoration.
  
2. We all need a reminder on Gaudete Sunday to rejoice! El Salvador was facing terrible times when he wrote these words, as are we, reading them in 2023. Pause to reflect on where you have found joy this week, even if only for a fleeting moment—in fresh snow, the laughter of a child, a Christmas card from a friend you miss dearly. Offer your joy to God and ask Him to root deeply in you the joy of the resurrection, the joy of what is to come. It is not a joy that sweeps away our sorrow, but a joy that glimmers alongside it.

## Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

Day 4

### Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us" (December 17, 1978)

"The Church community sings the hymn that we heard in this morning's first reading: 'I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul; for he has clothed me in a mantle of justice, like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels' (Isaiah 61:10). How beautiful to see a young man and woman who love one another and come before the altar dressed in their best clothes. They give themselves to one another in love. This is the comparison that Christ uses today, and it is the comparison that God used in the Old Testament to describe the covenant that God made because he wants to save us and all people who are in need of salvation.

The comparison becomes even more poetic: 'as the earth brings forth its plants, and a garden makes its growth spring up, so will the Lord God make justice and praise spring up before all the nations' (Isaiah 61:11). I imagine that one who plants a garden hopes that flowers will spring up. But the flowers spring up precisely because one who is a gardener has planted the seed. This is what God has done in his redemptive act when he says: 'The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners' (Isaiah 61:1). Does this not seem like the voice of the Church here in El Salvador shouting out: 'No more torture! No more suffering!' This is the voice of God who wants to plant goodness here on earth, and then the earth will flourish. The Lord has promised this and will not fail. Like the farmer, God is patient because in its time the garden will be revealed.

The beautiful hymn of the young people today proclaims: 'I have faith that everything will change.' Sing these words with great joy: 'I have faith that everything will change.' This will be accomplished because God has come—the Word has become flesh and wants us to live not simply as individuals. Keep this in mind because this is the cause of a great conflict in the Church today: the change from an individual piety to a communal piety. This is not the time to say: 'I am trying to save myself and other people are not important to me.' If we do not save ourselves with others, it is impossible that we will save ourselves by ourselves. The salvation that Christ has brought us is a communitarian gift—a gift for the Church. [...]

Note the beautiful words that the Council speaks to us: since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit, in a manner known only to God,

offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery.<sup>13</sup> These are very revealing words when I think about the extension of the Catholic Church and about the mission of the priesthood and the episcopacy and those consecrated as religious women and men—one can easily believe that only here can be found that which is good, and therefore everything else is evil. But I realize that this is nothing but a lie. The Council has just stated: outside the Catholic Church there are people who are called to this divine vocation, and the Holy Spirit leads them along paths that only he knows and makes them (even though they are not Christian) participants in this mystery of Christ.<sup>14</sup> How shameful to think that perhaps non-believers, people with no faith in Christ, may be better than we and nearer to God's reign.

Remember how Christ received a centurion and told him: 'I will go and cure your servant' (Matthew 8:5-10). The centurion, full of humility and confidence said, 'Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof ... but say the word and let my servant be healed.' The gospel tells us that Jesus marveled at this and said: 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.' I say: Christ will also say of this Church: outside the limits of Catholicism perhaps there is more faith, more holiness. So, we must not quench the Spirit. The Spirit is not the monopoly of a movement, even of a Christian movement or the hierarchy or the priesthood or some religious congregation. The Spirit is free, and he wants women and men, wherever they are, to realize their vocation to find Christ who became flesh to save all human flesh. Yes, to save all, dear sisters and brothers. I know that some people come to the Cathedral who have even lost the faith and are non-Christians. Let them be welcome. If this message is saying something to them, I ask them to reflect in their inner consciousness, for like Jesus, I can tell them, 'the Kingdom of God is not far from you! God's kingdom is within your heart! Seek it, and you will find it!' (Luke 17:21)"

---

<sup>13</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

## *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. We can hear in the echoes of the reading from Isaiah the cries not only of El Salvador, but also of our present-day nation and world. What might we add to the chorus in 2023? No more violence! No more death and dehumanization caused by racism! No more desperate and impossible choices to be made by people fleeing war! Reflect for a moment on the sorrows and tragedies you would personally add to that list. Part of believing that everything will change is taking an active role of participation in redemption. Romero reminds us that salvation is communal—we cannot think only of ourselves. Where can you help? How can you make your life a prayer for justice? Ask God to light the way for your next steps.
  
2. Romero gives us an important reminder here—much though we love the Church and find our home in her, the work of God cannot be contained within her alone. Wherever people of good will are engaged in good and redemptive work, God is at work in the world. Take a moment to call to mind all the places where you see the goodness of God alive and active in the world, both inside and outside the Church. Take comfort in knowing that there is goodness in every corner of the globe—people whose loving hearts and giving hands are bringing light to places of darkness.



## Third Sunday of Advent

December 13, 2020

Day 5

### Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-2, 10-11

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24

John 1:6-8, 19-28

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "The Word Became Flesh and Dwelt Among Us" (December 17, 1978)

"God became man and assumed this concrete flesh of crime and violence and darkness. All of this is flesh, a mixture of justice and abuse, of innocence and sin. Christ has taken on all of this in order to redeem us from sin and thus enables us to obtain the life of God, so that we might change our ways and participate in his divine life. Christ continues to become incarnate in our daily life [...]

We end with a thought that takes us to the altar: that God who became man assumed this real flesh of crimes, violence, inhuman things, unheard-of sufferings, of hopes and anxieties; all this is flesh, a mixture of justice and abuse, of innocence and sin; all this Christ has assumed, and this morning we have made concrete here in our community and in our country the realities of the flesh that we live. All this flesh has been assumed by Christ. Jerusalem, filled with joy, is set free and sees justice and love spring forth from the earth (Isaiah 61:11). Saint Paul exhorts us: 'May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thessalonians 1:23).

I also want to say [that] there are some words that have greatly encouraged me and relate to the Incarnation we have meditated on today. They are from the Cardinals of Paris, England and Belgium, who wrote me an unexpected letter which has given me much support. Among other things they say: 'We are mindful of the struggle for human rights that is based on the fact that each person is a visible image of the invisible God. In reality, in each woman and man we encounter God and his call on behalf of justice and love. The systematic violations of human rights are in themselves a negation of Christian faith in the Incarnation. We are pained that your prophetic witness is responded to by public attacks on the Church. We have read with great sadness about the ways in which the press and the other means of communication have begun a campaign of contempt and vilification that attempts to disparage your leadership. We want to take this opportunity to assure you of our fraternal solidarity.'<sup>15</sup>

I rejoice not because of this expression of personal solidarity but because this is an expression of solidarity with the Incarnation of God and with our human dignity. I rejoice because all of the things that we are doing, even though they might not be appreciated by some people, yet in the eyes of God and in light of the Word that we have been reflecting upon today—all these things

---

<sup>15</sup> Letter to Archbishop Óscar A. Romero from Cardinals François Marty, archbishop of Paris; Basil Hume, archbishop of Westminster; and Leo Jozef Suenens, archbishop of Brussels, in *Orientación* (17 December 1978).

are a reflection of the Incarnation. We see the greatness of God's love when he takes on our flesh, flesh that is worthy of contempt, yet God continues to love us even to the point of becoming a child in the manger of Bethlehem and to accept his crucifixion on the cross and continue giving us the sacrifice of the altar each Sunday and every day. So be it!"

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Every week, after delivering his homily, Romero would discuss the events of the week in El Salvador and in the Church, bringing the light of the gospel to them. This practice reminded his people, and us, of the deep meaning of the Incarnation: that there is no place too dark for Jesus to go, that there is nothing too scandalous for Jesus to redeem. Spend a few moments reflecting on the news of the week, in the world or in your own life. Do not fear those places of darkness. Pray, and trust that Jesus will enter them and bring light and healing to them. Trust that the gospel will be made concrete in your life and in the world around you, and ask the Holy Spirit for the eyes to see it.
  
2. Like all prophets who call attention to injustice and human rights violations. Romero faced harsh judgments and renunciations, both from within and outside of the Church. Less than two years after he spoke these words, he would be martyred while saying mass for daring to speak up for love and human dignity. Do you, too, face this resistance when you raise your voice in defense of others? If so, take heart. You are in very good company. Ask God for the courage to continue speaking boldly in defense of what is good and in condemnation of what is unloving and dehumanizing. When you are tempted to despair or to fear that the whole mission rests on your shoulders, remember all those who have gone before you and all those who walk alongside you, and be encouraged.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

### Day 1

#### Readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

#### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Mary, Sign of the Fullness of Time" (December 24, 1978)

"[...] Four weeks ago the Church gathered us together to celebrate this long period of hope and preparation, this time of promise and proclamation—this time that is called Advent. The whole Old Testament became present in our consideration of these Christmas preparations. Therefore, the person who best represents this history of the Old Testament is the woman who is pregnant and who will give birth [on Christmas]. This woman is seen throughout this long period of many centuries and is pointed out as that mysterious person who is drawing near to us—and her name is Mary. How beautiful to be able to join ourselves to the Mother of Christ, to unite ourselves in love to this woman who has also become our Mother. May the liturgy of the fourth Sunday of Advent [...] be an enthusiastic and loving homage of the People of God to our Mother, the Blessed Virgin!

The title of our homily is 'Mary, sign of the fullness of time.' As usual, we will develop the following three ideas: first, the mystery kept secret for long ages; second, the divine preparation in the Old Testament; third, the fullness of times symbolizes Mary pregnant with Jesus.

We will see that since redemption is operative throughout history, God desires to continue to operate in this way and save people through history. Therefore, the proclamation of the gospel has to be a prolongation of the salvific plan of Christ, an application of this plan to our history, people and reality. A proclamation of the gospel and a celebration of Christmas that simply recounts a romantic story that occurred twenty centuries ago and that does not incarnate the saving plan of God in the tragic and painful realities of our history or in the hopes of our people—such a proclamation would not be an authentic Christian message. God continues to save in history! Therefore, as we return to this event of the birth of Christ in Bethlehem, we do so not simply to remember the birth of Christ that occurred twenty centuries ago, but to live this event in the twentieth century, in 1978, in this Christmas season in El Salvador. Thus, in light of the Biblical readings, it is necessary to prolong the whole history that God has in his eternal mind, and this must include the concrete events of abductions and torture of our own sad history because it is here that we must encounter our God.

Let us call to mind the secret of the eternal centuries. Surprised by the greeting of the archangel who comes to her in the name of God, Mary is given her true name—a name by which all people will know her: 'greetings, favored one! Greetings, woman filled with grace! Greetings, woman exalted above all women, the one who found favor in the eyes of God, the one chosen above all women!' (Luke 1:28-29). Surprised by this heavenly ambassador to earth, Mary enters into a dialogue—not a dialogue rooted in rebellion but one that enabled her to become aware of the

tremendous responsibility that was being given to her: how can this be? The angel reveals that in Jesus the whole past is coming to light, the secret of the eternal centuries: ‘it is God who has chosen you.’

‘A mystery kept secret for long ages’ (Romans 16:25)—this is what is revealed in Christ, in the gospel, and this is what I also preach: namely that this Jesus, as the angel proclaimed to Mary, is a result of the power of the Most High. Therefore, the child to be born will be called the Son of God; he will be great, and his throne will last forever! This is the immortal King of the centuries, the Savior who fulfills the hopes of humanity. One of the most eloquent proclamations of this fact was made by Saint Bernard, the honey-tongued doctor, who imagined the Virgin in silence reflecting on whether she will say yes or no. He says: ‘Speak, Mary—say ‘yes!’ The course of our history is dependent on the words that come from your lips, and our hope depends on the consent that God asks of you.’<sup>16</sup>

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. Part of the joy of Advent is the knowledge that redemption and salvation carry on throughout all of human history, including ours. So often we picture Jesus as he has been depicted in the art we have seen since childhood: in sandals and robes, strolling through deserts or preaching from mountaintops. Those depictions are accurate to the historical person of Jesus, but not necessarily to the divine person of Jesus, who is equally present in every age, including ours. Take some time to meditate on the image of Jesus in your own city or town. As you pray imaginatively, note what he wears and the places he goes, the words he speaks and the gestures he makes. Dwell deeply in the knowledge that Jesus is just as present here as he was in Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. As you conclude your prayer, ask how you can walk alongside him, how you can partner with him in his mission of love.
2. Mary comes to us in such a special way during Advent, not only in the Nativity, but also in the Feasts of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Guadalupe. Reflect on these three different images of Mary—the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the Mother of God—and consider which one speaks most directly to your heart. Let Mary meet you wherever you are this day—in joy, in sorrow, in exhaustion, in fear, in hope. Breathe in deeply three times, and with each exhale, imagine Mary’s mantle being wrapped ever more warmly and tenderly around your body.

---

<sup>16</sup> Saint Bernard, *Homilies on the Excellences of the Virgin Mary*, 4,8.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

### Day 2

#### Readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

#### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Mary, Sign of the Fullness of Time" (December 24, 1978)

"Mary, the prudent Virgin, experiences the reality of being illuminated by faith. She experiences what Saint Paul tells us today: it is a mystery, and yet it is certain that God desires to save the world in Christ. The history of salvation that begins in her womb reaches its culmination in the Son of God. Here we are referring to the divine origin and the greatness that the gospel proclaims as salvation that can only come from God. Today Saint Paul describes the God of salvation history: 'Now to him who can strengthen you, according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ ... made known to all the nations to bring about the obedience of faith, to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever. Amen' (Romans 16:22,27).

Everything depends on God, and the initiative is found hidden in the mind of God. If God had not revealed in Christ his infinite love for us, we would have loved God greatly, but we would not have known God. It was necessary, therefore, to use the instrumentality of a woman named Mary so that his mind and his love could become incarnated. [...]

Centuries ago, before things existed, God thought of you. You, blessed woman, full of grace, you are a pure woman in the mind of God. As a loved one continually thinks of his beloved, so too God loved you, and loved you because you are a collaborator of his Incarnation and of his mind. He needs you! He loves you! You are blessed! [...] because of her humility and smallness, Mary was not aware of the fact that God in the eternity of time had her in his mind. At this moment in time, the Eternal Word by whom all things came into existence, the Word begins to be a fetus and then a child, and finally a man crucified on Calvary. God needed the pure womb of the Virgin. How wonderful it is to consider that in this hidden, eternal secret of God is Mary! [...]

Everything begins with God. In the first reading, God sends the prophet to the king, the greatest person in Judea. In the gospel, God sends the archangel to speak to Mary. At this time in our history of 1978, at this present feast of Christmas that we will celebrate, it is the same God who is present with the same love and with the same objectives that were operative when Mary was sent to Bethlehem. It is the mind of God that becomes tenderness and adoration and hope. In Mary, it is God who comes to us. Let us not forget, my sisters and brothers, that the salvation of our history and the salvation of each one of us with our personal problems that appear to be known by no one and understood by no one—yes, there is one who understands. From all eternity God has loved us, and we are significant in this history that God desires to fulfill for his glory. It is for this reason that Saint Paul says that God has this eternal secret, glory forever and ever (Romans 16:27).

This is the Christmas joy: I know that I am a thought in God’s mind, no matter how insignificant I may be—even if I am the most abandoned of human beings, one whom no one thinks of. Today when we think of Christmas gifts, how many outcasts are not thought about! Think to yourselves, you who are outcasts and you who feel that you are nothing in history: ‘I know that I am a thought in God’s mind.’ Would that my voice might, like a ray of light, of Christmas hope, reach the imprisoned! Would that my voice might also speak to you, the sick, the elderly in homes for the aged, hospital patients, you that live in shacks and shantytowns, you coffee harvesters who are trying to garner your only wage for the whole year, you who are tortured: God’s eternal purpose has thought of all of you. God loves you, and, like Mary, God incarnates that thought in your heart. You also have a mother and, like me, you experience the joy of having at this Christmas time a mother who taught you the way to encounter your brother, Jesus: namely, the Virgin Mary is that way. Let us experience this reality, my sisters and brothers, because all of us, with no distinction of social class, with no one being a first-class or second-class person, are sacred in the heart of God and the heart of Mary. God loves us and thought about us, and the eternal counsel, hidden in the eternal centuries, is going to begin to be revealed.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. “Everything begins with God.” It’s so easy for us, in the spiritual life, to depend on our own strength, our own actions, our own initiative. But meditate for a moment on the loving action of God that always precedes anything you do, the tender call to prayer or justice work that comes before you kneel down with your rosary or pick up your phone to make calls on behalf of those experiencing injustice. Look back over your life, briefly, and see if you can see those promptings of God, the way God has always been present and calling you to the good that you do in the world. Rejoice that we are never outside the embrace of God, and it is God who has drawn us there.
  
2. Do you believe that you are a thought in God’s mind? Do you believe that God knew you before the foundations of the world? Do you believe that you are precious to God? If not, carry your doubt to God, who will embrace you tenderly. As a secondary reflection, think of all those who are hurting, who are sick, who are abandoned and cast out of our society, who, it would seem, have good reason not to believe they are sacred to God. How can you meet them in their need and restore to them their dignity? No one of us can reach everyone, of course, but we can all pray for the direction to love someone concretely in our world marked with suffering and loneliness.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

### Day 3

#### Readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

#### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Mary, Sign of the Fullness of Time" (December 24, 1978)

"This is my second thought. Mary continues to be present in the mind of God when God begins his act of creation. God desires to save people in their historical context. If this mystery kept secret for long ages is going to be realized, then God desires that it be realized in a historical context. And therefore, history begins. According to Biblical revelation, the first chapter of the salvation of humanity, the first realization of the salvation that God desires to make operative with humanity, the first chapter of the relationship between God and humankind is that of creation. Creation is the beginning of time. This must be kept in mind: creation, the natural order, that which God has created, the intelligence that God has bestowed upon the human person, the wealth of the land and the fruits that it has produced—all of this was created by God. In this way we have the beginning of the history of salvation, and the first chapter is that of creation: 'Let there be light and water and minerals and cattle' (Genesis 1:3-27). God says to the human person: 'I have created everything for you and no one can possess these things with an absolute right. These things are for the happiness of the family that I created in the world' (Genesis 1:28-29). [...]

[In its document on divine revelation, the Second Vatican Council says,] 'After the age of the Patriarchs, he instructed the people through Moses and the prophets, so they could recognize him as the one true God, as a provident father and just judge; and so wait for the promised Savior.'<sup>17</sup> This was Moses' mission when God charged him with leading the Jewish people out of their captivity in Egypt, traveling through the desert and then entering the Promised Land. It was a historical person who brought about the salvation that God desires to give to all people: to lead people out of slavery. God needs the prophets to make people aware of their dignity: 'You do not have to be a slave to anyone, but rather must seek for the freedom that God offers you.' The book of Exodus is a wonderful book for all people to learn about their dignity.

We are still, then, in this context of creation. The human person is not born to be a slave or oppressed. Freedom is what makes us equal to God: 'let us make man in our own image, after our likeness' (Genesis 1:26). What distinguishes God is freedom, which is shared with all his creatures. [...] Moses and the prophets have planted the seeds of this freedom and denounced in strong language every attempt at oppression, every sin of abuse, and all those realities that disfigured the dignity of the human person. My sisters and brothers, read the marvelous prophetic books, and there you will find what is now said to be thin shadows of that which we ought to proclaim in the name of God who is jealous about this freedom which should be

---

<sup>17</sup> *Dei Verbum*, 3.

reflected in the human person and in society. He gives us the courage of the true prophets to call by their proper name those who assassinate or enslave or adore other gods or separate themselves from the person of the true God, the image of this God that is found on earth, this man who was man from the moment he was conceived in the womb of a woman.

Finally, the Council text states: ‘and in this manner God prepared the way for the Gospel down through the centuries.’<sup>18</sup> How beautiful are these words which express the reality that we read about during this Christmas season, the reality of Mary, pregnant and about to give birth. As Mary gives birth tonight, she brings into the world the revelation of the infinite love of God—an event that has been prepared for, unfolding, and being revealed throughout the centuries to the Chosen People.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. What a beautiful reminder Creation is of God’s loving care for us from the beginning of the earth. Imagine the echo of God’s love in the Red Sea that was parted, in the water that Jesus turned to wine, in the tree that was hewn into the cross. Can you feel, in your daily life, that iridescent glow of love in the natural world? Where do you see it? Ask God for the sensitivity of spirit not to miss it as it buzzes sacredly all around us.
  
2. The prophetic tradition is a great comfort in these terrible days of 2023, as it was in 1978 in El Salvador, and in every place and time. Where are you being called to speak prophetically, whether to a large audience, or simply to one other person? What is it in your life or in the world around you that you need to boldly and bravely call what it is? It’s natural to feel afraid when speaking prophetically. Prophets are, as a rule, not exactly met with welcome and acceptance. But when your voice falters or your courage is outstripped by fear, remember the prophets, from the Old Testament up through our days. Ask God to grant you boldness and perseverance, and other prophets to come alongside you in your mission.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 3.



## Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

Day 4

### Readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Mary, Sign of the Fullness of Time" (December 24, 1978)

"When referring to Mary, the Council speaks of this blessed woman who in the mind of God was preparing the way of the gospel: 'The books of the Old Testament describe the history of salvation, by which the coming of Christ into the world was slowly prepared.'<sup>19</sup> Does it not seem to you that as we have proclaimed the readings of the prophets during these Sundays of Advent, we have experienced the divine steps of someone who is drawing near to us? This is the Old Testament that is preparing for the coming of Christ into the world.

[The Council says,] 'These earliest documents, as they are read in the Church and are understood in the light of a further and full revelation, bring the figure of the woman, Mother of the Redeemer, into a gradually clearer light. When it is looked at in this way, she is already prophetically foreshadowed in the promise of victory over the serpent which was given to our first parents after their fall into sin.'<sup>20</sup> Mary appears in the beginning of history. When Adam and Eve are shamed and thrown out of Paradise, there appears the figure of a woman who would crush the head of the deceitful serpent, and this prefigures Mary, who will bring about victory over sin. [...]

[The Council says,] 'She stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from Him.'<sup>21</sup> All the aspirations of the Old Testament, all of the hunger for God: 'Come Lord and save us!', all the anguish of the prophets who ask God to send a savior as was promised—all of this is alive in the heart of the Poor of Yahweh, the Virgin Mary.

We repeat here what we said on the First Sunday of Advent: no one can celebrate an authentic Christmas unless they are truly poor. The self-sufficient, the proud of heart, those who despise others because they do not possess the material goods of this earth, those who do not need or want God—for these people there is no Christmas. Only the poor, the hungry, and those who need someone to come to them because they have need of someone, someone who is God, someone who is Emmanuel, God-with-us—only these people are able to celebrate Christmas. Without the spirit of poverty, one is unable to be filled with God. If God had not found the great emptiness of Mary's humility, he would not have come to the world because there would have been no one who could have been filled with God's grace. Therefore, we have reason to be

---

<sup>19</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

grateful to Mary because God had chosen her to be his mother because she was holy and humble, because no one else but she expressed the poverty of Israel, no one but Mary expressed the concerns of all the people. Mary is an expression of the needs of the people of El Salvador, the expression of the anguish of those who are imprisoned, the expression of those mothers who are suffering because they have lost their sons and/or daughters, and no one tells them anything about the whereabouts of their children. Mary is the tenderness that is anxiously seeking for a solution. Mary is in the midst of our country that at times appears like a dead-end street, hoping that God will come to save us. Hopefully we will imitate this Poor Servant of Yahweh and experience the fact that without God we can do nothing because God is the hope of our people and only Jesus Christ, the Divine Savior, can be the Savior of our nation.”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. It is hard to see, in times of distress, the joy of the Kingdom of God. Reflect for a moment on that first prophecy in the garden of Eden, that the serpent’s head will be crushed, that the goodness of God will triumph. If it is difficult to internalize that hope, try to view this not as a weakness, but as a gift: your poverty of spirit is what leads you to seek God. The gospel is full of such dramatic reversals: the last shall be first, the weak shall be strong, the meek will inherit the earth. Breathe deeply of the God of redemptive transformation.
  
2. “Mary is the tenderness that is anxiously seeking for a solution.” All that Romero speaks so full-heartedly about El Salvador in crisis could also be said about our country, our world, in its current crises. Take some time to meditate on the very real suffering faced by so many people in these days of war, economic distress, refugee crisis, racism, and injustice. Make a list, if you like, and then carry it all to Mary. Ask her to intercede for you and for all who suffer. Let yourself rest in her gentle care, knowing that her heart burns unceasingly with love and devotion for all her children.

## Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2020

Day 5

### Readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-5, 8-11, 16

Romans 16:25-27

Luke 1:26-38

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "Mary, Sign of the Fullness of Time" (December 24, 1978)

“And this is my third thought: Mary, sign of the plenitude of time. It is going to take some effort on our part to understand how God saves in a historical context and how time is a necessary element in the salvific action of God. At this time, it occurs to me to reflect on what happens when a painter is inspired to create a picture—the first thing he does is spread out a blank canvas. This is what God did at the time of creation. He spread out a blank canvas ... and time began to move forward. Time began to move forward because it is in time that God painted the wonderful picture of salvation. Israel's concept of time, as reflected in the Bible, is quite distinct from our western concept of time. We measure time, and for this reason we wear a watch and have calendars. For us, time is mathematical, and we use various instruments to measure time. For Israel, time was an experience, a reality that was lived. Thus, we encounter in the Bible the following words: ‘there is a time to weep and a time to laugh’ (Wisdom 3:4). The stars appear to divide night and day, the time during which people work and sleep. The Biblical concept of time is the blank canvas where God is painting and bringing and giving life to history. This history would be beautiful if it were painted according to the eternal plan. The mystery of long ages is realized on the canvas of history in collaboration with women and men. We thus have the history of salvation. [...]

Then the fullness of time arrived. According to the concept that we have analyzed, that is, the concept of time according to God, we see that the canvas that was extended by God had a central point of focus (just like the artist who undertakes a project and gives a central point of focus to his painting). The culminating point is called here the fullness of time. At the precise moment of the fullness of time the life of God comes to us. This is the moment when the Word becomes flesh in the womb of Mary, and thus the life of God comes to humankind, which for centuries, throughout the time of the Old Testament, was being prepared. Thus, in the fullness of time the whole plan and richness of God who desires to elevate us and sanctify us is made present to us. The Council states: ‘The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.’<sup>22</sup> If people want to understand their own mystery: the meaning of their pain, their work, their anguish, their hope, then let those people place themselves at Jesus' side. In this way they will accomplish what Jesus accomplished: they will do the will of the Father and fill themselves with the life that Jesus shared with the world. Then these persons will develop themselves as true persons. [...]

---

<sup>22</sup> *Gaudium et spes* 22.

The fullness of time is the sacraments which Jesus has given to us in order to share his life with us. The fullness of time is the hope of eternal resurrection that is planted in the hearts of Christians. The fullness of time is the proclamation that you are going to make within a short time: 'Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again!' Christ is present from the moment that Saint Paul described: When the fullness of time arrived, the Word of God was conceived by a woman who gave birth. In this Christ, born of the Virgin of Mary, 'the mystery hidden for long ages was revealed' (Romans 16:25). To know Christ is to know the only truth of history. Creating true history with God can only be done by those who have incorporated themselves into Christ, who is the image of the invisible God and the realization of the eternal hidden mysteries of the Lord.

So, you will understand, my dear brothers and sisters, why in the Sunday homily the archbishop is concerned to apply the message of the secret of eternal ages in the concrete reality of history. You can understand then, even though you might not like it, that this eternal light illuminates the evil features of our history and denounces them: history should not be lived in this way! On the other hand, those who are laboring well are told: history should be lived in this way! Therefore, in light of the God who comes to us at this Christmas time through the beautiful presence of Mary, sign of the fullness of times—my sisters and brothers, in this light we analyze our reality, and we do this with Mary who lived in the best way the reality of our people. Indeed, this was Mary's duty: to incarnate Christ in history. Mary becomes a Salvadoran and incarnates Christ in the history of El Salvador. Mary takes on your last name and mine in order to incarnate Christ in your family and mine, in order to incarnate us into the eternal life of the gospel. Mary is identified with the eternal life of the gospel, and thus Mary is identified with each one of us in order that Christ might be incarnated in our individual lives. Blessed are we if we make our devotion to Mary revolve around this reality. [...]

Thanks to God we can conclude with a note of joy and optimism and see some ways in which Christmas has inspired people to do good. [...] We want to remind you of the words of the Council: 'Do not give as alms what is due in justice.'<sup>23</sup> Before providing charity and distributing gifts and piñatas, etc., let us examine our work on behalf of social justice, for there can be no Christmas peace if the relationships of the people of El Salvador are not based on true justice. This is the peace that we desire. From this perspective of peace founded on justice, I say warmly to all of you: Happy Christmas!"

---

<sup>23</sup> *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8.



## Christmas (Midnight Mass)

December 25, 2020

Day 1

### Readings:

Isaiah 9:1-6

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "I Bring You Great Joy: A Savior is Born" (December 25, 1978)

"It is a great honor for the Church to be able to continue to cry out to the world every year the words that were heard for the first time in Bethlehem, words that were pronounced by the angels: 'I proclaim to you good news of great joy ... for today a Savior has been born for you' (Luke 2:10-11). The Church has no other reason to exist except to continue to proclaim this great news, this good news that is expressed by the word *gospel*. To evangelize means to announce the good news of salvation to the world. Therefore, on Christmas Eve, the heart of the Church is filled with joy as we see the Cathedral church as it is now, filled with faithful followers of Jesus Christ who honor his holy birth. At the same time this provides the Church, together with you, an opportunity to fulfill her mission.

My beloved sisters and brothers, tonight I have to gather together the good news and then as pastor I must proclaim it. But as a pastor I am one of those shepherds, and therefore I have to receive from the angels—hopefully with the same simplicity and humility as the shepherds—the news that moves hearts. The more simple and humble, the more poor and detached we are from ourselves, the more anguish and problems we might experience, the more impossible to resolve the problems of life, then all the more must we look toward the heavens and hear the good news: 'for today a savior has been born for you.' Then we will hear the choirs of angels proclaiming this great news, and a new hymn will be sung throughout the universe: 'Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests' (Luke 2:14).

God so loved us that he gave us his only Son who redeemed the world. In today's readings from the prophet Isaiah, Saint Paul, and Saint Luke's gospel, we discover very rich elements of the Christmas message that should be guarded in the same way that Mary guarded them. The Bible tells us that Mary kept in her heart all the things that the shepherds had told her that they had seen and heard. She reflected on these things in her heart because even though she was the chosen mother of Jesus, nevertheless, as a Christian, she knew how to ponder in her heart the great message of that holy night. She also needed this message. Who does not need Christ? Mary was most holy, but all the privileges of her holiness, the depths of her holiness and her closeness to God were due to Christ who came to save us."



## Christmas (Midnight Mass)

December 25, 2020

Day 2

### Readings:

Isaiah 9:1-6

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "I Bring You Great Joy: A Savior is Born" (December 25, 1978)

"The prophet Isaiah presents us with a light that illuminates the night. We celebrate the feast of the Nativity on December 25th, just a few days after the winter solstice, the longest night of the year. The ancient Romans thought that the winter solstice marked the beginning of the sun's birth. The nights became shorter and shorter until the time of the summer solstice, at which time the shortest night of the year is then seen as the triumph of the sun over the darkness. Christianity and the Church took up this pagan feast of the sun which was called 'the feast of the invincible sun.' The sun does not allow itself to be conquered by the darkness because even when the longest night of the year appears to oppress the sun; it is at that precise moment that the sun begins its victory march. The Church baptized this pagan feast and established December 25th as the feast of the Nativity. The object of this feast was not the adoration of the sun, which will at some time come to an end but rather the adoration of the eternal sun of justice, Christ, our Lord who is proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah tonight: 'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone' (Isaiah 9:1).

My sisters and brothers, is this not a beautiful message for our hearts? Who at some time has not felt as though their lives had become enclosed in the darkness of night because of doubts of faith or the uncertainties of life? Who has not felt unsure of where one has come from and where one is going? How much darkness is in the hearts of men and women, in the heart of society and so many people! The more that life and history appear confused, the more we need the brightness of the sun. Today, when we experience the longest night of the year, how consoling to think that precisely at this time when the darkness encloses us, the light of the Nativity changes night into day. Isaiah tells us: 'the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light' (Isaiah 9:1). Let us walk in the splendor of that light!

This is an invitation to faith because on this Christmas Eve we are all told to believe in Christ because he has said: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness' (John 8:12). I assure all of you, my dear sisters and brothers, and I say to myself: let us never turn our lives into the darkness of night, but rather let our lives be illuminated by the light of Christmas and by the joy of the great news of this night. As we journey through life we can count on the light and on a Redeemer."





## Christmas (Midnight Mass)

December 25, 2020

Day 3

### Readings:

Isaiah 9:1-6

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "I Bring You Great Joy: A Savior is Born" (December 25, 1978)

"In the second reading Saint Paul presents the birth of Christ from another aspect. The goodness and mercy of our God has appeared and invites us to approach the coming of God by responding temperately and justly in order to prepare ourselves for the second coming. We prayed today the beautiful prayer of Christmas: 'God our Father, every year we rejoice as we look forward to this feast of our salvation. May we welcome Christ as our Redeemer and meet him with confidence when he comes to be our judge.'

My sisters and brothers, the coming of Jesus on this Christmas Eve is a coming in humility, humble to the point that theology refers to this as *kenosis*, that is, humiliation, emptying oneself. Saint Paul tells us that even though Jesus had the dignity of God, he did not cling to this dignity, but emptied himself, humbled himself, and became human (Philippians 2:6-8). After living a humble and poor life, he handed himself over to be judged and sentenced to the most humiliating death in history, crucified as a common criminal. Jesus was born for humiliation, for *kenosis*. Thus, in the life of Jesus everything is humiliation. The gospel has told us that there was no room in the inn, not even a small room for the birth of the greatest to be born. His parents had to seek refuge with animals, in a stable where Joseph cleaned out the rubbish and garbage so that Mary could give birth in the most dignified way that the situation of poverty allowed. Thus, the Redeemer is born: in a situation of humiliation and poverty.

It is necessary to understand that Jesus is born to redeem the world and that the redemption of the world could not be achieved except by the opposite path by which women and men had offended God. We offended God by our pride and vanity and selfish wealth, by our power and all those other realities that are called sin. We disobeyed God. Therefore, redemption must be a return to the paths of humility, obedience, austerity and self-denial because it is on these paths that we discover the goodness and the mercy of God who forgives us our sins. People do not so fear the forgiveness of the Lord that they would not undertake a return along the paths that Jesus teaches us, paths where we will find redemption. This Christmas Eve is an invitation to the simple-hearted to live a life of humility. It is an invitation that is extended to us by Saint Paul to lead a life of temperance and a life of sacrifice (Titus 2:12)."



## Christmas (Midnight Mass)

December 25, 2020

Day 4

### Readings:

Isaiah 9:1-6

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

### Excerpts from Romero's Homily "I Bring You Great Joy: A Savior is Born" (December 25, 1978)

"My dear sisters and brothers, the goodness of our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, and with this goodness comes the grace of redemption, all the richness of the life of God. It is for this reason that when Christ becomes incarnated in the womb of Mary and is then born, this moment is called the fullness of time. The fullness of time means that this child has fulfilled the promises of God. The fullness of time also means that in this child who is born of the Virgin we find the richness of redemption that everyone needs. In Jesus we discover our glory, our hope and our joy. Let us open ourselves to our Lord, Jesus Christ, even though He appears as a poor child, even though his death is one of humiliation on a cross and even though his paths are the ones that he spoke about when he said to his followers: 'Foxes have dens, and the birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head' (Matthew 8:20). 'For whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me' (Matthew 16:24).

Therefore, the Church preaches from the perspective of the poor, and we are never ashamed to say 'the Church of the poor' because it was among the poor that Jesus desired to establish his seat of redemption. This is not because money is evil, but because so often money makes people idolaters of the things of the earth, and they forget God. But when people are detached and have the courage to make their path and their joy the path of the beatitudes (for example, blessed are the poor, blessed those who weep, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness), then they will understand that redemption has come, and that redemption only walks along these paths that women and men do not want to travel. Tonight, let us accept the message of the Lord's goodness and mercy because when he comes a second time as Judge, his coming will not be one of humiliation but one of justice in which he will claim as his own the honor of God before all those who despised him. At the same time, he will gather up all the blessed of the Father who followed him. Then at that time we, my sisters and brothers, will experience the Christmas joy as we are now experiencing it this evening."



## Christmas (Midnight Mass)

December 25, 2020

Day 5

### Readings:

Isaiah 9:1-6

Titus 2:11-14

Luke 2:1-14

Excerpts from Romero's Homily "I Bring You Great Joy: A Savior is Born" (December 25, 1978)

"At this time, I believe that the joy of Christmas, especially here in El Salvador, is a calm joy, a joy of Christian hope. I have heard many voices at this time that have told me: 'How sad is Christmas!' There are many who are suffering, and so many homes do not have their loved ones with them. In El Salvador there is sadness at this time of Christmas, 1978. But those who are Christian know that in their deepest being, there is a joy, a joy of hope and faith, a joy of austerity and a joy because the mercy of God does not repent for having handed himself over and allowed us to find his mercy. I invite everyone to live this calm joy during this Christmas season. Glory to God that we do not have a Christmas with so many commercial realities because those joys pass so quickly, like the ashes that are thrown out. I want everyone who is participating in this reflection to experience profound joy: joy in the midst of our history of sadness, terror, and anguish, because beneath all of this there is great hope. The Lord has come, and we go out to meet him. We trust in him who comes to save us, and the more joy that we give to this night, then it is impossible for the night to overcome us. The Lord is our Redeemer. Tonight is a night of prayer, and together on the altar of Jesus who is born and who has come to save us, we place all our prayers and our hopes with the calm joy that alone can give us true hope in the words of Jesus: 'Peace I give you, but not as the world gives peace' (John 14:27). [It is] a peace that is the fruit of sincere conversion that awaits everything from God.

My dear sisters and brothers, lastly, the gospel tells us that Christ is born in history, in concrete circumstances. For example, there is mention of the emperors of Rome, the governors of Palestine, concrete people in history, and all of this tells us that Jesus is born into the concrete history of humankind. No, we are not simply talking about the time of twenty centuries ago that is described by Luke in the passage that we have just read, but today in 1978—if the birth of Jesus and the celebration of Christmas were written about today, other names would be mentioned. The Lord has been born for us, and so we are not remembering a birth that took place at some other time, as if Joseph and Mary and the shepherds and the Magi (all of whom have died) have simply left us a remembrance of something past. No, the liturgy, the celebration of the Church has the privilege of making present the mystery that we are celebrating. Today is Christmas in the Cathedral. Today Jesus is born here for us. The prophet Isaiah has told us: 'a child is born to us; a son is given to us' (Isaiah 9:5).

May we truly experience this reality because I know that each one of you, like me, has a need of embracing Jesus as our own, Jesus who is born for everyone and who remains with everyone and

is given eternally to each one of us in such a way that each one can say as Saint Paul said: He loved me and handed himself over for me (Galatians 2:20). Let us then experience the Lord as the redeemer of our family, the companion of our life, the confidant in our time of anguish, the redeemer who is the redeemer of you and me and all people.

Let us celebrate this Christmas Eucharist with profound faith and hope regardless of the fact that this is the longest night of the year. What is important is the light of faith that illuminates our hearts because in the midst of our present sadness and anguish there is a hope that enables us to trust fully in the child who is born for us. So be it!”

### *Meditative Prayer Suggestions*

1. El Salvador faced such terrible circumstances in 1978. We do here and now, too. Let us stand together across the years and miles in the beautiful words Romero gave us: “I want everyone who is participating in this reflection to experience profound joy: joy in the midst of our history of sadness, terror, and anguish, because beneath all of this there is great hope.” It is so tempting sometimes to turn to God as a wish-granter who will fix every difficult situation in our lives. But may we remember that Jesus, too, knew pain, and that he is with us in it. Spend some time reflecting on your experience of Advent and of Christmas. Make an offering to God of both your sorrows and your joys. Give thanks for all the circumstances and situations in which you have found Jesus drawing near to you. Prepare this gift, as the wise men did, to lay at the manger on Epiphany.
  
2. We close this devotional with a reminder of our Christmas joy, one that can carry us not only through the rest of the Christmas season until Candlemas, but through every day of our lives. There are, undoubtedly, hard roads ahead of us, personally, nationally, and globally. Let us then commit all the more to keep the light of Christmas burning as we go forth to love and to serve one another. St. Óscar Romero, pray for us!

## Further Reading

Romero, Óscar. *The Scandal of Redemption*. Walden, NY: Plough, 2018.

This is a collection of excerpts from Romero's diaries and homilies and is a great place to start reading the work of this great saint.

Walters, Kerry. *St. Óscar Romero: Pastor, Prophet, Martyr*. Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2018.

Kerry Walters provides an in-depth biography of Romero with lots of cultural context. This book is also available as an e-book through [formed.org](http://formed.org) if your parish has a subscription.

Wright, Scott. *Óscar Romero and the Communion of Saints*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009.

This beautiful biography includes many photographs by Octavio Duran, a Salvadoran Franciscan who was Romero's personal photographer.