

Preaching at Christmas with St Oscar Romero

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“I preach the word of a Church that since the time of Christ has said there is hope.” (Advent 2, 1977)

“God’s word is like a ray of sunshine that comes from on high and illuminates. ... Just as the sun illuminates the beauty of flowers and the enchantment of nature, so also, sisters and brothers, the word of God illuminates the horror, the ugliness, and the injustice of earth. On the other hand, it also encourages those good hearts, which are numerous, thanks be to God; it brightens them with the eternal light of his divine word. This is what it means to preach the word of God today.” (Advent 2, 1977)

“...‘I announce to you great joy: to you is born a Saviour’ (Luke 2:10-11). The Church has no other reason to exist in the world except to be ceaselessly announcing that great news bulletin, that Gospel - a word that means ‘Good News.’ Evangelizing means announcing to the world this news of salvation.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“Our mission is to make God present in a world that needs him.” (Advent 3 1978)

Introduction

Welcome to everyone joining this webinar organised by the Catholic Association of Preachers on *Preaching at Christmas with St Oscar Romero*.

This many seem an unusual title. *Preaching at Christmas* we can understand – we all face the joy, maybe the ordeal, of preparing at the great Christmas Feast to come. But why *Preaching at Christmas with St Oscar Romero*? For three main reasons and a further, fourth, minor reason.

1. First, Romero was a fine preacher. He understood the Scriptures in the context of his troubled El Salvadoran Church and people during terrible injustice and violence. He speaks to the experience of our world and to the hearts of many.
2. Second, Romero offers beautiful insights into the Scriptures of Advent and Christmas and their significance for discipleship.
3. And third, Romero offers inspiration to preachers, not necessarily to be quoted extensively. or even at all; but the themes he preached might help us, triggering a thought, offering a lens or a hook for our own Christmas preaching.
4. The fourth, minor reason, is that I have been a great Romero fan since I was 17.

Romero: A Preacher of Hope

On 14 September this year, Pope Leo quoted Romero at a Commemoration of Christian martyrs and witnesses from the Twenty-First Century:

Our God, said Romero, “is a God who wants to be with men [and women], a God who feels the pain of those who are tortured and killed, a God who restores faith in the Church. He is a living God, who feels, acts, works, and guides this history, and in him we hope, in him we trust.”

“In God we hope.” This theme underpins everything about Romero. In the most difficult circumstances, he preached hope, something much more than wishing things would turn out fine, or putting on a cheerful face. Romero preached Christian hope, the hope that stands at the heart of this Jubilee Year.

If you want a summary of Christian hope, go to the *Catechism*:

“Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ’s

promises and relying not on our own strength, but on the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit. “(CCC 1817)

In Romero’s own words: “Christ alone is the source of our hope and our security. This is our project of salvation.” (Homily, 10 February 1980)

It was hope in Christ that enabled Romero to give such extraordinary service - faithful unto death - as an outstanding shepherd in the most terrible situation. It was hope in Christ for a better world - where Gospel truth and human dignity are honoured - that made Romero an outspoken critic of the violent injustice that destroyed so many Salvadoran lives during the civil war from 1979 to 1992.

“Christian Hope,” preached Romero, “is the great Key to Our True Liberation ... The goal of our hope is the kingdom of God.” “It is,” said Romero, “the kingdom of God that Christ came to establish in our time ... the seeds of eternity are already there in the human hearts that hope and believe in our Lord.” (Homily 18 November 1979)

Christian hope for eternal life in Christ is incarnated. Its fulfilment finds anticipation here and now, in this present life: the hope for faith, justice, peace, and human dignity. “We have a great hope,” said Romero “that God moves with us in our history.” (Homily, 9 December 1979)

As a theological virtue and a truth of God’s kingdom, hope is something eternal, but also something already among us. Hope was born into the world that first Christmas and hope is born into the world again this Christmas.

Romero’s Life and Martyrdom

Romero believed we can each make a difference for the better, towards others and towards our world. When the Lord Jesus said ‘Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do this to me,’ (Mt 25:40) Romero took Christ at his word and said ‘Amen’ - I believe it. This truth grounded his existence, so much so that, in imitation of Christ, he could, literally, lay down his life for Christ and the people he loved.

Minutes before he was assassinated, on 24 March 1980, Romero preached these words:

“God’s reign is already present on our earth in mystery. When the Lord comes, it will be brought to perfection. That is the hope that inspires Christians. We know that every effort to better society, especially when injustice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us.”

Oscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez was born in El Salvador, in Ciudad Barrios, on 15 August 1917 and ordained a priest in Rome on 4 April 1942. He was appointed General Secretary of the Bishops’ Conference of El Salvador in 1966, Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador in 1970, Bishop of Santiago de Maria in 1974, and Archbishop of San Salvador on 3 February 1977. It was a time of national crisis. There was a wealthy ruling elite, a militarised government, and a poor oppressed working class. In response, some had turned to guerrilla warfare. Following a manipulated presidential election on 20 February 1977, the government deployed military forces to suppress legitimate protests. Into this brutal state of affairs stepped the new Archbishop, not entirely welcomed by everyone. Although shy and reserved by nature, Romero found a voice to speak against violence and injustice, becoming ‘a voice for the voiceless.’

Throughout his ministry, Archbishop Romero spoke against injustice and violence. Inspired by the Second Vatican Council, he read the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. Through homilies and pastoral messages, he interpreted the experience of his people through the teaching of Scripture and the Church. As he became more outspoken against oppression, so the threats to his life increased. In his Sunday homily on 23 March 1980, Romero demanded that soldiers refuse to obey any orders to kill innocent people. For those in power, this was the last straw.

On 24 March 1980, while celebrating Mass, Archbishop Romero was assassinated aged 62. He was martyred ‘in hatred of the faith,’ not as a soldier or a politician, but as a prophetic shepherd. Romero was declared ‘Blessed’ in San Salvador on 23 May 2015 and canonised by Pope Francis on 14 October 2018 in Rome. His feast day is 24 March.

Romero the Preacher

Romero's homilies as Archbishop of San Salvador span from March 1977 to March 1980. They are available in print, and also online through The Archbishop Romero Trust at romerotrust.org.uk. In recent years they have become the focus of serious theological reflection.

Within his preaching, Romero always presented the news and events of the week, the tragedies and consolations of the nation, Church and people. This remained the same at Christmas, providing essential information people might not receive in any other way. But he always powerfully related the Scriptures to the local and national situation, drawing a word of life from the Word of God. Romero was a classic 'three points' preacher sandwiched between an introduction and conclusion.

It always amuses me when people comment to clergy in these weeks that "it must be coming up to your busy time," as if we are bone idle the rest of the year. Romero's diary records his Christmases as Archbishop as a busy time of visits to clergy and religious, pastoral meetings, celebrations of First Holy Communion, Confirmations, and Weddings, as well as vigil and day Masses for the feast. He spent time consoling those working with orphans whose parents had been kidnapped, imprisoned or killed by the military.

Preaching at Christmas with Romero

To help our own preaching this Christmas I have chosen **fifteen themes** drawn from Romero's own preaching. From a prayerful reading of the Scriptures, he explored the contemporary experiences of his Church, people, and nation. The themes will be familiar, but Romero brings his own unique perspective.

With these themes, for the next hour or so, I will offer various quotes from Romero, merely a small selection from Romero's complete homilies. The best way to do this is to let Romero speak for himself.

I will make this entire text available through the Catholic Association of Preachers so that it can be emailed out to you.

But I suggest that, as we move through the themes and quotes, you might just make a note of words or phrases that strike you as preliminary preparation for your own preaching this Christmas. We will then have a little time for some shared reflection.

Theme 1 - Christmas is not merely a recalling of the past, but living a contemporary truth

The Church's "liturgical celebration is not simply remembrance of some past event" Rather, "recalling ... the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of her Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present for all time, and the faithful are enabled to lay hold upon them and become filled with saving grace." (SC 102)." (Advent 1 1977)

"Christ ... continues to come through the mystery of the Church's liturgy," "so that every Christian of good will can enter into personal contact with him." (Advent 1 1977)

"... when we reflect back on this episode of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, we are not recalling the birth of Christ twenty centuries ago; rather, we are experiencing that birth now." (Advent 4 1978)

"... the King of glory, the Lord of eternity, [is] born in Bethlehem *as part of our history*. Christmas is all about celebrating God's coming among us to walk at our side in the history of all the world's peoples." (Advent 2 1979)

Theme 2 - The Word of God has power to speak to our experience today

Christ's presence sheds light "on the realities of our families, and the intimate realities of each one of us. ... It becomes God's word because it vivifies, enlightens, contrasts, repudiates, and praises what is going on today in this society." (Advent 1 1977)

The word of God "is not something written centuries ago that remains ethereal, theoretical, and disembodied. Rather, the preacher must

incarnate this word in our present reality.” We need endurance “to live in this historical time. These writings enable us to maintain our hope by joining the ancient Scriptures with the endurance and encouragement we need.” (Advent 2, 1977)

“The word of God ... touches the present wounds and the injustices of today.” (Advent 2, 1977)

Theme 3 - Emmanuel, God with us

“Emmanuel” means: “God with us.” Christmas is the mystery of God visiting humankind, but God doesn’t just come for a visit and then return home. No, he comes to stay.” (Holy Family, 1978)

“God became a companion of every human life; he became a member of every family; he became a child of every home. ... Even in the humblest of dwellings – Christ is there.” (Holy Family, 1978)

“The whole of the Christmas mystery ... is summed up in this reality: God enters history and reveals himself to humankind.” (Holy Family, 1979)

Christmas “is a **mystery of imminence**: God descends into history, taking on all the problems of humanity. He becomes incarnate in all peoples ..., but he does so not just to remain there but to transcend. For Christmas is also a **mystery of transcendence**: if God becomes human, it is so that we humans will be raised to divinity. (Holy Family, 1979)

Theme 4 - Christ is born for us as the Lord

Christmas, is “the glorious appearance of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). ... we draw near to a crib that is not simply that of a child; it is the crib of a God-Child. ... In those days when the Gospel was written, calling Jesus “Lord” was to issue a direct challenge to the idols of the earth. For Christians there is only one Lord who has been born today and whom we adore, one Lord before whom we bend our

knees for there is no other lord of history or time. Christ is the Lord! Christ is the Messiah! Christ is the Saviour!" (24 December 1977)

Theme 5 - The nearness of God in Christ

God comes close to us in Christ "despite the pessimism and distress we feel during these times when the horizons of life and history appear to be closed. God comes to us and opens paths of light, and all God asks of us is that we respond with faith and trust in him." (Advent 4, 1977)

"Feeling God to be near us, we should be intensely hopeful. ... **our joy should not be ... superficial**" but "**the profound joy of faith**, a joy that we project onto the realities that surround us because we are people who have our feet firmly planted on earth." (Advent 4, 1977)

Theme 6 - The Word made Flesh

"Christmas cannot be understood unless we have faith in the great mystery of the incarnation ... God's becoming present among the realities of this world in a man called Christ." (Advent 3 1978)

"In Christ we have a revelation of God ... Now there is no need for third-party messengers like the prophets who came to speak about God's revelations Now the Lord himself has come, the very Word of God." (25 December 1977)

"Becoming flesh is a strange antithesis, a union of opposites - **God-flesh, infinite God and limited flesh**. The infinite God is enclosed in a man who belongs to a people and a history, ... God desires to continue this mystery in each one of us." (25 December 1977)

"Nothing human is strange to Jesus Christ because he became flesh, wanting to assume into his dignity as Son of God all that human flesh signifies." (Advent 3 1978)

"... Christ was a man who belonged to a kingly dynasty as God had promised. As a man he belonged to our history; he suffered as every

human suffers; he carried in his human heart the anguish of one and all; he was human. How wonderful it is ... to think that Emmanuel, God-with-us, is a man, a human person who understands us, accompanies us, consoles us, and enlightens us. "(Advent 4, 1977)

"[T]he beautiful prologue of the Gospel of Saint John begins: "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1). Notice the past tense, "was" - he already existed. At the beginning, when God began to create things, the Word already existed, he already was. ... The truth is that history is nothing more than a short stretch of time that began and will end. But Christ, as God, is the Lord of history because he existed before history and will exist after all the worlds have ended." (Advent 3 1978)

"Everything we experience Jesus experienced: weariness, sadness, discouragement, loneliness, happiness, enthusiasm, friendship. Everything the human heart feels has been felt by God in Christ. That is why Christ is the revelation of humanity to human beings." (25 December 1977)

"Since the Church prolongs the incarnation, that is, God's becoming human, she cannot prescind from human history. God assumed human form from that moment on, and he entrusted to the Church the task of bringing all people to God." (25 December 1977)

Theme 7 - Christmas salvation, redemption and liberation

"[The Church] tells all who work for liberation that a liberation without faith, without Christ, without hope, is not authentic; a liberation brought by violence and revolution is not effective. Liberation must begin with the redemption of Christ, the redemption from sin. Laws and structures are meaningless as long as people do not renew themselves interiorly and repent of their sins and try to live more justly." (Advent 4, 1977)

"Redemption must take us back along the paths of humility, obedience, austerity, and self-denial. On those paths will appear the merciful kindness of the God who forgives us. ... This Christmas night is an

invitation to simplicity of heart and humbleness of life...” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“[T]he kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ has appeared, and with that kindness comes every grace of redemption and all the treasures of God’s life.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“[W]hen we’re detached and courageous enough to make our happiness consist in the way of the Beatitudes ... then we’ll know that redemption has come.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“Christ came to immerse himself in history and to save history. He came to plant the seed of salvation in the history of every people and to sow his hope and his faith in the heart of every race. Christ is the fullness of revelation ... the sign that God is in our midst loving us and understanding us.” (Advent 2 1979)

“What fills our celebrations with joy is God’s entering history. We feel joy at being made confidants of the Lord, who ... calls us human beings to collaborate with him in the salvation of the world.” (Advent 3 1979)

“Jesus is the salvation of God in history. [His name] means “God saves.” Jesus is just that: “God saving.” He is God’s salvation who became a child in Bethlehem and was crucified on Calvary. Through the church the life of Jesus is prolonged in history. He will save people from their sins.” (Advent 4 1979)

Theme 8 - God enters and shares our history

“With the coming of Christ ... God has injected himself into history. With the birth of Christ, the kingdom of God is inaugurated in human time. Every year for twenty centuries now, we remember this night when the kingdom of God arrived in the world, this night when Christ inaugurated the fullness of time.” (24 December 1977)

Christ’s “birth signifies that God is walking with humans in history; we are not alone on our journey. We can hope for peace and justice ...; we

can hope for something holy and far beyond earthly realities, not because we humans can create this blessing proclaimed by God's sacred words but because God is already in the midst of humanity, building a kingdom of justice and love and peace." (24 December 1977)

Theme 9 - We are instruments in service of Christ

"When people do not oppose or ignore God but consciously become God's instruments, then they are like Mary and Joseph; they are like the shepherds." (24 December 1977)

"Let our hearts be open like a cradle so that Christ can be born in each soul tonight and from there flood every heart with light. Then we will sing with the angels the news that we must bring to all people, to the whole of society, and to the whole of the nation: "Today a Saviour has been born to you!" (Luke 2:11)" (24 December 1977)

"Christ is being born today in our people and in our hearts to the degree that every Christian tries to live with integrity the Gospel, the Christian life, the standards of the true church of God. To the extent that we do this, we are like the apostle [St Paul] and like Mary; we are like the shepherds who give glory to God and sing with joy because they have come to know Christ; and like those humble shepherds of Bethlehem, we try to bring this news to others. To do this, a sincere conversion to Christ is necessary; we must be converted to the love that has visited us; we must echo the infinite goodness of God who brings us redemption. ..."
(24 December 1977)

Theme 10 - Christmas hope

"If you feel misunderstood and have a personal problem that no one seems to know about, you should realise that there *is* someone who understands. God has loved you from all eternity. You are a key detail in that history that God is creating for his glory." (Advent 4 1978)

The simpler and humble we are, the more impoverished and dispossessed, the more filled with anxieties and problems, the tougher

the course of our lives, then all the more must we look toward the heights and hear the great news: 'A saviour has been born for you.' (Luke 2:11)" (Christmas Eve 1978)

"Before Christ everything was simply hope, promise, prophecy. When people finally saw Christ present, they asked, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?" (Luke 7:19) The One who was the hope of the nations, the hope of the ancient prophets and patriarchs, today becomes reality in this new-born child." (24 December 1977)

"[T]he light that shines brilliantly in Bethlehem is a sign of our hope. Let us not be discouraged when our hope is put to the test. Let us hope against all hope and hold fast to this fullness of time. ... Christmas "marks the beginning of the kingdom of God that we await with confidence." (24 December 1977)

"Let us not be discouraged even when the horizon of history appears dark and closed off, as if human realities made it impossible for God's plans to be accomplished. God can make use of human mistakes, even of people's sins, to overcome the darkness: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwell in the land of gloom a light has shone." (Isa 9:1) (24 December 1977)

"How I wish that we would be inspired, not by the pessimism, sadness, psychosis, and fear all around us, but by the angel's confident message: 'I bring great news.' Whatever catastrophes may come, there is always renewal. God 'makes all things new.' (Rev 21:5). (Christmas Eve 1979)

"While the cycles of history grow old, the Good News remains always alive...." (Christmas Eve 1979)

Theme - 11 Christmas joy

Christmas joy "is not a worldly joy that delights in material pleasures. It is not the false joy that people call 'happiness' but that is really bitterness, anxiety, and nastiness. It is the joy produced by the peace of God in our hearts." (Advent 2 1979)

“Joy should give us energy. It should impel us into action ... with the holy joy of those who trust in the Almighty. ... the joy of those who are truly happy, even when standing by the cross. ... This joy should be our testimony to all humankind.” (Advent 2 1979)

“If we are seeking a profound explanation for our Christmas joy, which many people feel but few understand, then we find it here: newness has entered the world. **Christmas is always new, and it is always news.** Every Christmas Eve, even though twenty centuries have passed, the angel keeps announcing, ‘I bring you great news,’ and the world is renewed with this fresh shoot that has been grafted onto history.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“No Christian should feel all alone on the journey. No family should feel abandoned. No nation should feel pessimistic even in the midst of what seem to be insoluble crises God is in our midst! Let us have faith in this central truth of the sacred revelation. God is present; he is not asleep. He is actively observing and helping us, and in his own time he will act favourably. So, let the presence of God awaken true joy in our hearts” (Advent 2 1979)

Theme - 12 Celebrating Christmas in the context of struggle and suffering

“There is anxiety, there is uncertainty, there are so many people suffering; ... but as Christians we know that there is a deeper joy, a joy that comes from faith and hope, a joy that comes from hardship and from knowing that God does not repent of giving so freely of the mercy we have found.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“I encourage everyone to celebrate Christmas with ... peaceful joy. ... Despite all our distress there is a hope: ‘You have come, Lord, and we have found you. We put our faith in you, knowing that you come to save us. We know that the darker the night becomes and the more closed the horizons, even more still will you be our Redeemer.’” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“This is the night foretold by the prophet Isaiah: “In the middle of the night, a great light shone.” (Isa 9:1) ... Is this not a magnificent message for our hearts? Which of us has not felt at some time that our lives had become pitch-dark nights because of doubts about faith or the uncertainties of life or our ignorance about where we’re coming from and where we’re going? What great darkness there is in the hearts of individuals and societies and nations! The more confused our lives and our history appear to us, the more we need the brilliance of this sun. ... Let us also walk in the splendour of that light!” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“This Christmas night invites us to faith; it is a night that says to the hearts of all, ‘Let us believe in Christ’... that our lives never become shadowy nights but may always be illumined by the serene light of Christmas and by the joy of this great news. At every stage of our life we can count on the bright light of a Redeemer.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“... the liturgy and the celebration of the Church have the power to make immediately present to us the mystery that we are commemorating. Today is Christmas **here** ... Christ is being born for us **today**. ... He is here **now** for us.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“Let us ... celebrate this Christmas Eucharist with profound faith and hope. ... What matters is the light of faith that shines in our hearts. What matters is the hope we have in the midst of the sadness and distress of the present moment, a hope that inspires in us full confidence in this child who was born for us.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

Theme: 13 - A poor Christ at Christmas

In the child born in Bethlehem “There is no longer a privileged people and a marginalized people. All of us are coheirs in the mystery of Christ.” (Epiphany 1978)

Christ “was wrapped in cloth and lying in a manger, poor as the poorest of the poor. ... The penniless Christ wrapped in cloth is the image of the God who humbles himself. It is what theology calls **kenosis**: he emptied himself of all his glory.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

The “coming of Christ at Christmas is a humble coming, so humble that theology calls it **kenosis**, which means abasement to the point of disappearance. ... Not even a tiny room was available for the birth of the greatest of persons to be born; he had to find refuge in a stable for animals, in a manger. It was there in a stable that Joseph had to clean up the rubbish and find a place for Mary, who was about to give birth. That was the most decent setting that their situation of poverty allowed. That was how the Redeemer was born: into humiliation, into poverty.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

“This descent of God has great meaning for us tonight. Let us not seek Christ in the opulence of the world or among the idolatries of wealth. Let us not seek him in the struggles for power or among the intrigues of the mighty. God is not there. Let us seek God where the angels say he is: lying in a manger on a little straw, wrapped in the poor bit of cloth that a humble woman of Nazareth could afford. There we find resting the God who has become man, the King of the ages who makes himself available to us as a poor little child.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“If we want to find the child Jesus today, we shouldn’t contemplate the lovely figures in our nativity scenes. We should look for him among the malnourished children who went to bed tonight without anything to eat. We should look for him among the poor newspaper boys who will sleep tonight on doorsteps, wrapped in their papers. We should look for him among the poor shoeshine boys who perhaps have earned enough to buy a little gift for their mothers.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“Not all is joy tonight. There is much suffering. There are many broken homes. There is much pain and poverty. ... God demands justice whenever there exists the tremendous sin of oppression.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“In the midst of my poverty and misery, in the midst of my oppression and captivity, I must never forget that I am the exact imprint, the image of God.” (25 December 1977)

“We cannot experience a need for God if we are proud and self-sufficient. Only those who are poor, only those who are hungry will be filled. ... Blessed are those who see the coming of Christmas in the same way that a hungry person sees the arrival of a plate of food.” (Advent 3 1978)

“The self-sufficient, the prideful, those who think they have everything and so despise others, those who have no need of God - for them there can be no Christmas. Christmas is only for the poor, the hungry, those who need someone to come and help them - and that someone is God, Emmanuel, God with us.” (Advent 4 1978)

“Without poverty of spirit we cannot be filled with God. If God had not found in Mary the immense emptiness of her humility, he could not have come into the world; there would have been no one worthy to receive him.” (Advent 4 1978)

“That is why the church preaches from the perspective of the poor and why we are never ashamed to talk about the ‘church of the poor.’ It’s because it was among the poor that Christ wanted to teach his lesson of redemption. It’s not because money is evil but because money often turns people into slaves who worship the things of earth and forget about God. We’ll truly understand that redemption has come when we’re able to rise above the things that make people happy according to the world’s criteria.” (Christmas Eve 1978)

Theme 14 - Christmas points to eternity

“The song of the angels, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14a) ... points to the eternal goal of our lives.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“Let us live always mindful of our origin in God, never losing sight of our destiny, which is the glory of the Most High.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“In order to find the secret of [Christmas] joy ... Let us remember the child who brought newness into history, into our lives, ... into everything that is life and nature. Let us remember the child who was born in a manger and wrapped in cloth so that our poverty, our pain,

and our suffering would make sense to us. Let us remember the child whose crib reminds all of us that our destiny is the glory of God in the highest heavens. May this Eucharist be for us an encounter with the Jesus who every day is alive in our Mass, reminding us of this great message of Christmas.” (Christmas Eve 1979)

“... the great mission that Christians have at this critical moment of our land [is] keeping hope alive. We should not be expecting a utopia or entertaining illusions that drug us so that we can't see the reality. To the contrary, we should be closely observing this reality which by itself can yield nothing, but which can still produce wonders if only we appeal to God's transcendent redemption.” (Epiphany 1979)

Theme 15 - Our Lady at Christmas - tenderness and faith

“Mary cannot be absent from our Christmas hopes. A Christmas without Mary is a Christmas without tenderness. ... God wants to give us his graces through the tenderness of a mother.” (Advent 4 1977)

“When we behold the child Jesus in the arms of Mary, let us elevate our minds. We need the great virtue of faith. Mary needed faith to see in the child she nourished at her breasts not just any child but the incarnation of God. In her child Jesus, Mary adored truth, eternal life, God become human. That is why the Virgin Mary should be the model for all Christians who celebrate Christmas.” (25 December 1977)

Beautifully, Romero put words onto Our Lady's lips as she helps us to understand the mystery of her child:

“My child is nothing more and nothing less than the manifestation of God to humankind. ... he is the revelation of humanity to human beings themselves; he reveals their dignity, the divine greatness they bear as images of God. Know how to be worthy of this imprint that each person bears. ... this child in my arms is the precious image of the church that will be prolonged for centuries, bringing God's life amid human deficiencies and the poverty of the manger in Bethlehem.” (25 December 1977)

Conclusion

Romero invites us to ask: can we hear “the angels are singing” over us: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.” (Luke 2:14) Can we hear “as though people ... hearing for the first time and being surprised by the good news of the angels’ announcement in Bethlehem: “We proclaim to you good news of great joy; today a Saviour has been born for you.” (Luke 2:10-11). (24 December 1977)

Preaching at Christmas must be “a prolongation of the saving project of Christ, applying it to our history, to our people, to our reality. The kind of preaching that tells only romantic tales of twenty centuries ago would not be authentically Christian, and neither would our Christmas celebrations if they did the same.” (Advent 4 1978)

Romero’s Christmas Prayer - (Slightly adapted)

“I know, Lord, that Christmas is the time when you draw near to [your] people. I know that our government, our collaborators, and our Church are anxious for a happy future. I know that no one wants bloodshed, violence, or misfortune.

Lord, teach us your ways even though we may not understand them. Give us a sign that you are with us, because Emmanuel, God-with-us, is not a promise of something over and done with. We know that you have remained with us, and you live among our people. This is our great hope during this Christmas season: God is with us. God comes personally to save us. We don’t know how, but he comes.” (Advent 4 1977)