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A man wearing glasses and white mitre and vestments stands at a lectern and speaks with ar

Washington Auxiliary Bishop Evelio Menjívar celebrates Mass in honor of the Divine Savior of the World in the Crypt Church of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington Aug. 12, 2023. (OSV News photo/Javier Diaz, El Pregonero)

Andrea Acosta

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Washington — August 16, 2023

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Washington Auxiliary Bishop Evelio Menjívar, the first Salvadoran-born bishop in the United States, celebrated a Mass in honor of the Divine Savior of the World -- the patron of El Salvador -- urging the faithful to get attuned to God, listen to others, walk together and transform themselves to fulfill the mission to which God has called us.

"If Christ has wanted to reveal his glory and his identity as the beloved son of the Father, it is so that his splendor may enlighten us and reveal who we truly are," said the auxiliary bishop Aug. 12 in the Crypt Church of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. "And the glory of Christ transfigured illuminates today his people, his pilgrim church so that we may recognize our dignity

as beloved children of God, so that we may renew our hope, so that we may be a light for others and illuminate the world with the light of Christ."

Menjívar prayed to God for the welfare of his homeland and said that a transformation is also urgent in the Central American country where he was born.

Typically celebrated on the day of the Transfiguration of the Lord, some historians say the observance of the feast in El Salvador dates back to 1525, the same year that the province of San Salvador was established. On this celebration, Catholics meditate on the experience of transfiguration, which is the glorious state in which Jesus Christ showed himself full of splendor and majesty on Mount Tabor before his disciples.

The bishop made an individual call to be attentive to "the voice of God that speaks to us in our innermost being." He invited nearly 500 faithful "to attune our minds and hearts to the voice of God. Let us breathe deeply and fill ourselves with light, love and hope."

He also urged the community of faith to walk together because "united we are stronger and we will make a way for others to follow us." He asked the faithful not to be agents of division in the community and to put aside gossip and rivalries. "Walking together means having one heart, one feeling, one goal: Christ."

To walk together, he said, we must learn to listen to God, also to others. In that way, "the world would be much better, also families, schools and parishes. How many conflicts and misunderstandings could be avoided just by listening to the other."

On this patronal feast, Menjívar addressed the reality of his country: "It is an opportunity to pray for our beloved homeland and thank God for the progress made in recent years, especially in the area of security," he said. "We give thanks for the many lives that have been saved and for the possibility that many families have, especially children, to walk in the streets and parks with more peace of mind. Thank you for all the good that has been done, but we recognize that there is still much to be done so that Salvadorans can live their lives with the dignity they deserve."

A change of attitude is urgently needed to recover a sense of co-responsibility and citizenship. "The homeland is not built by those who govern, we all build it because it belongs to all of us. We are all responsible and we have to do our part, even in the distance," he said.

"It is urgent that there be a true transfiguration in the homeland, having Christ as a model so that the new man/new woman may appear and transform their environment," he said, echoing Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero.

Menjívar also said that the Savior of the World is now coming to "challenge us, to wake us up from our sleep, from our lethargy, where we only see a blurred image of reality and the future."

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He called Massgoers to be attentive to the voice of God, who "invites us to allow ourselves to be transfigured by his love and mercy. By being transfigured we gain the vitality and courage to fulfill the mission entrusted to us."

The Mass, organized by the archdiocesan office of Cultural Diversity and Community Outreach, was preceded by a procession through the grounds of the basilica with the image of the Divine Savior of the World.

This brought back childhood memories for attendee Haydeé Martínez, who used to process through the streets of her town of Metapan, El Salvador, in the days close to Aug. 5 and 6.

"He is our patron saint and we have great faith in the Divine Savior. Through him we have faith in the church, it binds us to her," Martínez, a parishioner of St. Andrew Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland, told El Pregonero, the Spanish-language newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington. "The celebration of the Divine Savior of the World is for Salvadorans like the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe is for Mexicans."

Martínez, a cradle Catholic, said that her country's patron saint inspires her and gives her strength every day. "It is a source of pride, an honor to see how our Divine Savior of the World is honored in the basilica," she said.

Although she has been living in the United States for 34 years, this is the first time that this Salvadoran mother has attended this archdiocesan celebration in the basilica, which has been held for many years and has become a meeting point for the Salvadoran community and a tradition for Catholics in the metropolitan area.

"I am here because I have faith in our savior, Jesus Christ, and I can see that all nationalities are united in this festivity," said Guatemalan immigrant José González, president of the Knights of Columbus of Sacred Heart Parish in Washington, where most of the faithful are Salvadorans. Ten Knights were present at the service.

González, who came to the procession with his wife and daughter, had a third reason for attending this Mass: He was born Aug. 6, the day the Catholic Church celebrates the Transfiguration, which has inspired the traditional "bajada" of the Savior of the World at the San Salvador Cathedral, where the image of Jesus dressed in purple robes descends into a wooden globe to later emerge dressed in white -- symbolizing Jesus's transfiguration.

His wife, María Guevara, a native of Mexico, said she came because of her deep faith in God. "I see the devotion of the Salvadorans (at the shrine). I know it is a very special occasion for them."

The feast is in honor of Jesus Christ, she said, regardless of nationality, she added. As someone looking to instill faith traditions in her children, she believes this display of popular religiosity "revives our Hispanic culture in the United States."