

## LAST HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP ROMERO

March 24, 1980\*

Because of the manifold relationships that I have had with the editor of the newspaper *El Independiente*, I am able to share to some extent his feelings on the anniversary of his mother's death. Above all, I can appreciate her noble spirit, how she put all of her educated upbringing, all her graciousness, at the service of a cause that is so important now: our people's true liberation.

My dear sisters and brothers, I think we should not only pray this evening for the eternal rest of our dear Doña Sarita, but above all we should take to ourselves her message, one that every Christian ought to want to live intensely. Many do not understand; they think Christianity should not be involved in such things. But, to the contrary, you have just heard in Christ's gospel that one must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us, and that those who try to fend off the danger will lose their lives, while those who out of love for Christ give themselves to the service of others, will live, live like the grain of wheat that dies, but only apparently. If it did not die, it would remain alone. The harvest comes about only because it dies, allowing itself to be sacrificed in the earth and destroyed. Only by undoing itself does it produce the harvest.

Now in eternity, Doña Sarita gives us the same wonderful message that Vatican II gives us in the following passage that I have chosen on her behalf: *We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. Then, with death overcome, the sons of God will be raised up in Christ, and what was sown in weakness and corruption will be invested with incorruptibility. Enduring with charity and its fruits, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity. Therefore, while we are warned that it profits a man nothing if he gain the whole world and lose himself, the expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing of the new age. Hence, while earthly progress must be carefully distinguished from the growth of Christ's kingdom, to the extent that the former can contribute to the better ordering of human society, it is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God. For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in His Spirit nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom, and indeed all the good fruits of our nature and enterprise, we will find them again, but freed of stain, burnished and transfigured, when Christ hands over to the Father: "a kingdom eternal and universal, a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace."(24) On this earth that Kingdom is already present in mystery. When the Lord returns it will be brought into full flower (Gaudium et Spes, #39).*

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\* Translator's Note: Archbishop Romero celebrated Mass for the first anniversary of the death of Sara Meardi de Pinto, the mother of Jorge Pinto, publisher and editor of *El Independiente*, a weekly newspaper that was one of the few voices for justice and human rights in El Salvador. The Mass began at about 6:00pm in the chapel of the Divine Providence cancer hospital, in San Salvador. The gospel reading was John 12:23-26. This homily was translated by Michael J. Walsh and appears in *Voice of the Voiceless*, Orbis Books: Maryknoll, New York, 1985.

This is the hope that inspires us as Christians. We know that every effort to better society, especially when justice and sin are so ingrained, is an effort that God blesses, that God wants, that God demands of us. Doña Sarita was that kind of generous person, and her attitude was embodied in her son Jorge and in all those who work for these ideals. Of course, we must try to purify these ideals, Christianize them, clothe them with the hope of what lies beyond. That makes them stronger, because it gives us the assurance that all that we cultivate on earth, if we nourish it with Christian hope, will never be a failure. We will find it in a purer form in that kingdom where our merit will be found in the labor that we have done here on earth.

As we celebrate this anniversary, I think we do not aspire in vain in these times of hope and struggle. We remember with gratitude this generous woman who was able to sympathize with the concerns of her husband and her son and of all those who work for a better world, and who added her own grain of wheat through her suffering. I have no doubt that this will guarantee that her heavenly reward will be in proportion to her sacrifice and to her sympathy --- self-sacrifice and sympathy that many lack at this moment in El Salvador.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us all view these matters at this historic moment with that hope, that spirit of giving and of sacrifice. Let us all do what we can. We can all do something, at least have a sense of understanding and sympathy. The holy woman we remember today could not do many things directly perhaps, but she did encourage those who could work and she sympathized with their struggle and above all, she prayed. Even after her death, she sends a message from eternity that it is worthwhile to labor, because all those longings for justice, peace, and well-being that we experience on earth become realized for us if we enlighten them with Christian hope. We know that no one can go on forever, but those who have put into their work a sense of very great faith, of love of God, of hope among human beings, find it all results in the splendors of a crown that is the sure reward of those who labor thus, cultivating truth, justice, love, and goodness on earth. Such labor does not remain here below but, purified by God's Spirit, is harvested for our reward.

The holy Mass, now, this Eucharist, is just such an act of faith. To Christian faith at this moment the voice of diatribe appears changed for the body of the Lord, who offered himself for the redemption of the world, and in this chalice the wine is transformed into the blood that was the price of salvation. May this body immolated and this blood sacrificed for humans nourish us also, so that we may give our body and our blood to suffering and to pain --- like Christ, not for self, but to bring about justice and peace for our people.

Let us join together, then, intimately in faith and hope at this moment of prayer for Doña Sarita and ourselves.

*(At this moment, a shot rang out in the chapel and Archbishop Romero fell mortally wounded. He died within minutes, on arriving at a nearby hospital emergency room).*