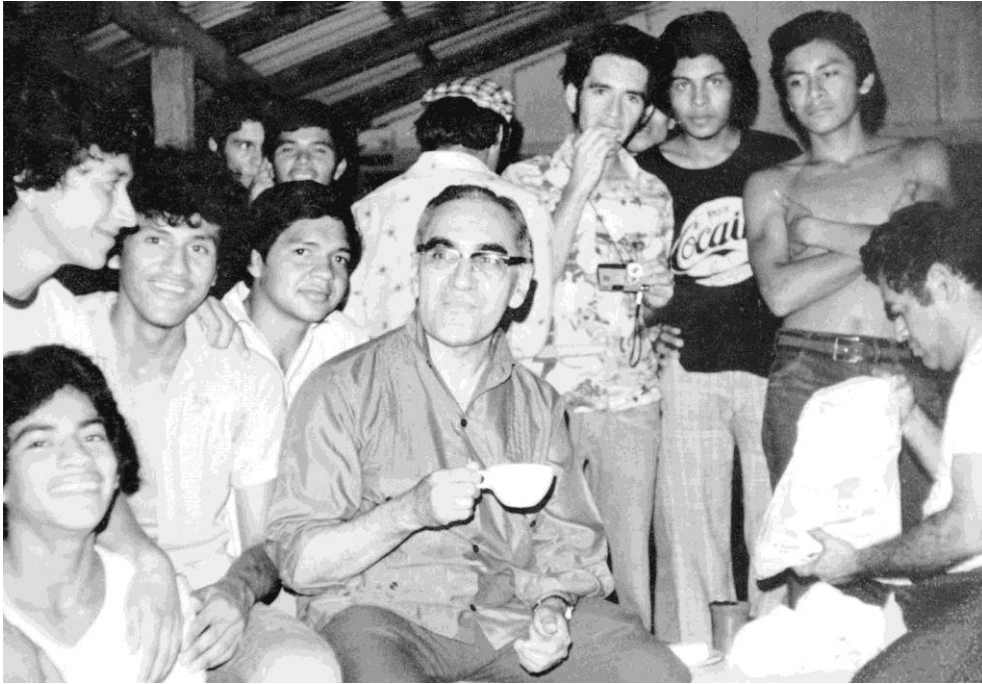


Romeronews

Issue 16: July 2015

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Celebrating **Blessed** Oscar Romero



Born:
15 August 1917

Martyred:
24 March 1980

Beatified:
23 May 2015

National Thanksgiving Mass
15 August 2015
St. George's Cathedral, Southwark, 12:30
ALL WELCOME

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Romero in St. Albans: David Skidmore reports as Romero's statue is installed at St. Alban's Cathedral.

Bargain books

FOR YOUR DIARIES:

Saturday 15 August 2015

12:30

**National Thanksgiving Mass for the
Beatification of Blessed Oscar Romero**

St. George's Cathedral, Southwark

Celebrant: Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor

Preacher: Bishop John Rawsthorne

All welcome

Mass will be followed by a reception in Amigo Hall

Romero Memorial Lecture

***From Romero to Francis: The Joy and the
Tensions of Becoming a Poor Church with
the Poor***

St. George's Cathedral, Southwark

Thursday 1 October 2015

19:00

Speaker: Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga



Photo: Gabriele Merk - Deutsche Provinz der Salesianer Don Boscos

2016 Romero Trust Pilgrimage

13 – 25 November (provisional dates)

Following the successful journeys in 2010 and 2013, a further eleven day pilgrimage from Britain to El Salvador, led by Clare Dixon and Julian Filochowski, is planned for mid-November 2016 to visit the holy places associated with Blessed Oscar

Romero and the martyrs of El Salvador. It will coincide with the 27th anniversary celebration of the Jesuit martyrs at the University. The estimated cost is £1700 per person inclusive of flights, meals and accommodation.

If you would like to know more or be part of the pilgrim group please register your interest with the pilgrimage

organiser, Anthony Coles, at

arctc@btinternet.com

THE BEATIFICATION – EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS

Bishop John Rawsthorne travelled to El Salvador for the beatification ceremony.



(Bishop John Rawsthorne, centre of picture, in the melee.)

We had hardly arrived in San Salvador before somebody told us that about ten days previously eighty five people had been killed on a single day. Gangs versus gangs. Though that day had been exceptional, people are being killed every day of the week through gang warfare. It is still a suffering country and a poor suffering people. It was no surprise to hear calls from Cardinal Amato and Archbishop Paglia at the beatification ceremony for people to continue to walk in the footsteps of Blessed Oscar, most especially in his way with the poor people. His work is by no means over.

While the day of the beatification was blessed with glorious weather, the outdoor vigil the previous evening had seen constant downpours. We were all soaked to the skin. But nothing could dampen the spirits of the people. There was a great sense of real deep down joy everywhere. At the end of the vigil Mass, we searched in vain for the taxi which we had arranged to meet us. A local family, sitting in their

car, watching the rain, saw our discomfort and drove us all the way home. It was a wonderful gesture and typical of the spirit of the weekend.

The rain cleared the atmosphere for the day of beatification and we all set off at the crack of dawn, priests and bishops vesting in the local parish church. That was an experience in itself. The world and its aunt was there, mainly the Spanish speaking, but from all over the world, with names that resonated from difficult times in Central and South America. It was the most special of days for everybody. It was an affirmation, not simply of Archbishop Romero, but of all those who had carried their crosses on similar paths in so many of those countries.



(Bishop Raul Vera OP, from Saltillo, Mexico, in a folk-decorated mitre.)

Needless to say, our group managed to get as close to the front of the huge crowd as it was possible to get! The altar was set at the convergence of a number of main roads. As always in these situations, it was very difficult to know how large the crowd was. Estimates varied between three hundred thousand and seven hundred thousand and I suspect that somewhere in between would be about right.

It was an entire country rejoicing. The beatification took place in the presence of the President of El Salvador. The police and the army were both

present visibly but not obtrusively. I went out of my way to smile and say hello to every one of those we passed and I got a response in every case! But it was a day for the People, the ordinary people of El Salvador. It was truly fiesta time. The joy was palpable. It was their day, their Archbishop who gave his life because he lived and spoke for them.



(The joyous crowd.)

The organisation for the occasion and the liturgy itself were beautifully done. The proclamation of beatification is a very simple but very profound statement. It refers to Romero as:

Bishop and Martyr.

Pastor according to the heart of Christ.

Evangeliser and Father of the poor.

Heroic Witness of the Kingdom of God,

The Kingdom of Justice, of Brotherhood and Peace.

A succinct and embracing description of the life and death of Oscar Romero. As the Proclamation was made, in Latin and Spanish, a halo appeared around the Sun! I have a photograph of it!



On Sunday, we went to the main Mass at the Cathedral, another great occasion, even if the Archbishop did preach for a full fifty minutes!



(Bishop John, standing on the right, inside the cathedral.)

And it was wonderful to hear Bishop Rosa Chavez, Auxiliary Bishop of San Salvador, mention Clare Dixon and Julian Filochowski in his words of thanks to those who had made significant contributions over the years leading to this moment of beatification.

The main relic on view both at the beatification and in the Cathedral was the shirt that the Archbishop was wearing when he was shot. Jan Graffius had done all the work of stitching it into the shape that it would hold within the very ornate reliquary which had been specially designed by Oscar Panameno. At the Cathedral Mass, it was announced that the reliquary would be going round all the parishes of the Diocese - and that meant more work for Jan because she had prepared it for this special occasion, not for the sort of treatment a journey of that kind would involve.

Climactically, on Sunday afternoon, we celebrated Mass with three Chigwell Sisters in the Convent Chapel at the very altar where Blessed Oscar was murdered. That was a most special moment for all of us, a great and most moving privilege. And then we had coffee with the Sisters themselves after Mass. That was just the right way in which to end our Pilgrimage of Joy.



(Leading Mass in the hospital chapel where Romero was martyred.)

Clare Dixon attended the beatification. This is her blog, published by the Tablet on 25 May. <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/blogs/1/645/even-the-gangs-declared-a-truce-for-romero-s-beatification>

Torrential rain on the eve of a holiday weekend may dampen our spirits in the UK, but in drought-stricken El Salvador, Friday's downpour heralded an auspicious start to the biggest weekend in the country's history.



At the airport and throughout the city huge billboards and posters welcomed countless visitors to the land of now-Blessed Oscar Romero. At dusk, tens of thousands processed along the Avenue separating San Salvador's cathedral from the venue of Oscar Romero's beatification at the Saviour of the World Square. As we prepared to celebrate the vigil Mass the heavens opened. Yet all around us the atmosphere was one of celebration and excitement

as local clergy on the raised platform swayed while leading enthusiastically sung popular songs praising Romero to the rhythms of salsa: it gave a whole new meaning to the concept of "Latin Mass". As Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez celebrated, torrents of water continued to rain down until 4am, when the crowds started to queue to find the best vantage points for the beatification.

After a suffocatingly hot week, the rains ushered in a Saturday fresh with a light breeze. I accompanied Bishop John Rawsthorne – who was representing the Bishops of England and Wales, CAFOD and the Romero Trust – to negotiate road blocks and police checks and we arrived shortly after dawn at a seminary where over 1,000 priests and 81 bishops and cardinals were robing. As we filed out into the midst of the crowds – estimates range from 350,000 to 700,000 people – a deafening wall of applause, cheering and cries of "Viva Romero" went up and we were swept along by an army of volunteer stewards: the London Olympics seemed subdued by comparison.



(Volunteer stewards marshal the crowds.)

The weather was to provide one more surprise: as the Pope's Apostolic Letter praising the new Blessed was read out, there was a collective gasp as the bright sun appeared with a rainbow halo around it. An unusual climatic phenomenon, for the devout congregation it seemed like a message from

heaven, as the crowds, government leaders, cardinals and bishops alike, craned their necks in wonder at this extraordinary sight.

Just as in South Africa, where it's impossible now to find anyone who was against Nelson Mandela, in El Salvador you would be hard pressed to find anyone with a bad word about Oscar Romero. The efficiency and organisation of the event, only two months after the beatification date was announced in March, confounded fears – and some cynical commentators - that there would be chaos on the day. Everything went like clockwork; the Government – led by former FMLN guerrilla leader, Salvador Sanchez - had invested its reputation and resources in making this a day to be proud of, even the gangs declared a truce for the duration of the festivities. Reports claimed that this was the largest gathering ever for a non-papal beatification ceremony. That it was held in the tiniest republic of the Americas, with no open space large enough for crowds of this magnitude was close to a miracle in itself.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator of Romero's cause, called on all Salvadoreans to make Romero's motto - *Sentire Cum Ecclesia* - their own. For a future of peace and justice they should "*Sentire Cum Romero*". Amen to that



(The altar for the beatification Mass, with Romero's phrase "Think and feel with the Church".)

**ALLOCATION ON THE BEATIFICATION OF THE
MARTYR OSCAR ARNULFO ROMERO y
GALDAMEZ
BY ARCHBISHOP VINCENZO PAGLIA,
POSTULATOR OF THE CAUSE
SAN SALVADOR, MAY 23, 2015**



(Archbishop Paglia (centre), with, from left, Julian Filochowski, Sr. Elvia, Sr. Maria Julia, Jan Graffius, Oscar Panameno (designer of the reliquary) and Mons. Rafael Urrutia, standing behind the preserved relic of Romero's shirt.)

Brothers and sisters,

Today there is a big celebration here in El Salvador. And a big celebration in heaven. *[Applause.]* If we lift our eyes upwards we see the heavens and Oscar Romero surrounded by many men and women who rejoice with him. They are priests, men and women religious, catechists, and simple faithful who were brutally murdered. *[Applause.]* And many others who have followed him, listened to him, and loved him. They are all a precious treasure of the faith of the Church of El Salvador, the faith of this land. Among them we see Monsignor Rivera Damas, who started the beatification cause. *[Applause.]* And Rutilio Grande, with Nelson and Manuel, whose cause for beatification is now in process. *[Applause.]* They all see him and celebrate him in union with us.

Truly, Romero is now Blessed. Truly he is happy for this day. *[Applause.]* But, he is not happy because it is his beatification. He doesn't need it. Romero is

happy because he sees us together. This was his dream for this country and the Church. [Applause.] It is for them that he gave his life. [Applause.] His beatification makes us breathe this dream, it reawakens us and from heaven he urges us not to let it go to waste, not to let it burn out. This means that it is time for a new era for El Salvador, and for anyone who loves the Church and the poor. [Applause.] This is how we take forward Romero's legacy. He loved to say that the Second Vatican Council calls on all of us, all Christians, to be martyrs, that is, to give our lives for the gospel, for others, and for the poor. Yes, dear friends, this beatification asks us all to be martyrs: to give our life for others, for a world of peace and love as Archbishop Romero did.

Our goal is to walk with Pope Francis toward the canonization of Archbishop Romero. That means ... [Applause.] That means walking together with him, distancing ourselves from all forms of violence and practicing love and peace. This is the miracle we ask of Blessed Oscar Romero: that by his miracle we stay united and change the world with our love. Only love—not violence—changes the world. [Applause.] So — so we could translate the motto of Archbishop Romero “think and feel with the Church” to “think and feel with Romero”. [Applause.] Yes, we think and feel with Romero, brothers and sisters. And El Salvador and the world will change. Thank you very much. [Applause.] [The crowd shouts “Long Live the Pope!” And finally “Long Live Romero!”]

JAN GRAFFIUS – A CURATOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE CELEBRATIONS

Jan Graffius, Curator at Stonyhurst College, has worked with the Sisters of the Divine Providence Cancer Hospital for several years to preserve the clothing that Romero was wearing at the time of his martyrdom, and other relics.

The celebrations for the Beatification of Archbishop Oscar Romero lasted three days, officially, although the people of San Salvador will continue to celebrate for some time to come.



On Friday 22nd May, I spent a long and rather intense day preparing the bloodstained shirt which Romero was wearing when he was murdered, and then placed it in a newly made reliquary. This was a lengthy and complicated piece of conservation, as the shirt is fragile and the bloodstains have made the fabric brittle. The reliquary has been designed so as to make the folding of the shirt necessary, which is less than ideal from a conservation point of view. I carefully interleaved the folds with acid free tissue, to pad out the fabric and made a cushion from conservation textiles, then attached the shirt to it. That complete, the shirt was sealed into the reliquary, which was to be carried shoulder-high by eight seminarians. As the reliquary weighs some 400lbs, they were chosen for their strength and stamina.



(Above: The shirt in its reliquary is carried through the crowds. Previous photo: Jan at work on the shirt.)

That Friday evening, there was an open air mass and all-night Vigil, with fireworks and giant projections of videos of Romero onto nearby buildings in the city centre. The weather was apocalyptic- torrential tropical rain and violent thunderstorms - but nothing dampened the spirits of the thousands who turned out, despite the fact that we were all drenched to the bone within seconds.

On Saturday 23rd May, my day began well before dawn at the Divine Providence Cancer Hospital, where Romero spent the last three years of his life, and where he was murdered. After a sustaining breakfast of maize pancakes, scrambled eggs, fried plantain, cake and coffee, I got into a minibus designed to carry twelve, but into which considerably more nuns were crammed. No seat belts, just lots of prayer. The roads around the Plaza Salvador del Mundo where the ceremony was taking place had been closed, and we joined the vast, good-natured crowds on foot.

I was privileged to have a special pass, allowing me into the enclosure for guests, right beside the altar. Behind me an estimated 500,000 people cheered and danced in the streets, shading themselves from

the scorching sun with brightly coloured umbrellas.



The ceremony and mass took nearly four hours, and was accompanied by stirring Salvadoran music. Just after the words of Beatification were pronounced, a rare solar halo ringed the sun with a circular rainbow- a most remarkable sight, which had all the bishops on the altar pointing up at the sky in amazement. There were a hundred Bishops and Archbishops, seven Cardinals, numerous Vatican officials and around 1,000 priests on the altar, all wearing specially designed scarlet vestments embroidered with Archbishop Romero's name. After the ceremony, the unofficial street party took over and continued for the rest of the day and into the night.

On Sunday May 24th, mass was celebrated in the Cathedral, first upstairs in the main church, and then downstairs in the massive crypt, where Romero's tomb lies. Both were crammed with people, bringing flowers and handwritten prayers and intercessions, and the air rang with Salvadoran folk songs.



I have never known an experience like this. The intensity of emotion was deeply moving. The love of the poor for Romero is as powerful now, thirty-five years after his death, as it was during his life. They cannot forget the sacrifice he made on their behalf, his tireless efforts to seek peace in his war-torn country, and the fearless way he championed their human rights, living and preaching the Gospel of the Beatitudes. It has been a great and rare privilege to play a small part in these celebrations, and I am certain that the newly beatified Oscar Romero will continue to inspire and bring hope to the poor and oppressed of the world. As the Archbishop of San Salvador said in his homily on that Sunday- Viva Romero!

SALVADORAN VOICES

Yance, factory worker, El Salvador



"When I heard the news that the Pope had declared Mons. Romero a martyr, I was so happy. The past has left a deep wound in the people

of El Salvador, and he was the voice of all of us. It is right that justice has been done towards him. Justice was never done before, because there has always been a ruling class in our country who oppress us, the poor, and out of this comes injustice. So we are really happy that Mons. Romero has finally been given justice, he speaks on our behalf, he gave his life for us. He lived the repression we suffered."

See this 1-minute CAFOD video to hear the voices of Yance, a teenager, a student, Mons. Urioste, and Fr. Pico SJ who is based at the Central America University:

<https://www.facebook.com/CAFOD/videos/10152920858477945/>

HE HEARD THEIR VOICE: ARCHBISHOP ROMERO – MYSTIC AND PROPHET

Fr. Brian Pierce OP was the Guest Speaker for Romero Week 2015. Here is the essence of his reflections.



I'd like to begin with a story told by a young man who had entered the seminary at the time when Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador.

"I was asked one day to sweep and clean and mop the entire seminary building. As I went by the chapel on the top floor I saw that at that early hour of the morning there was a priest praying in one of the front pews. He was all alone, kneeling. I kept going down the hall, and after a while I had practically polished the whole floor. He was still there praying. The fool didn't even move. I went down another hall and got it all shiny and then went back and peeked again into the chapel. There he was, still kneeling. Why so much prayer, I thought? There is so much happening in this country, and all he can think of doing is praying? He needs to learn a few things from Monseñor Romero. Now there's a man with fire in his heart and in his words, a man that doesn't waste his time. I was angry with that praying man, whoever he was. If he doesn't come out, I am going to go in and mop the chapel floor. I went in, I went up and down with my mop, getting closer and closer to that motionless lump of a man, and then I looked at him from head to toe. It was Monseñor Romero.

He didn't even move. When I left the chapel, he was still there, kneeling and praying. I left with my bubble burst, and the mop over my shoulder like an empty musket."

This is the man we know as a great prophet. But he was as great a contemplative as he was a prophet, and those two things cannot be separated in his life.

From Mark's gospel, chapter 10:

They came to Jericho and Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho. Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me". Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more, "Son of David, have mercy on me". Jesus stood still and he said, "call him here". They called the blind man saying to him, "Take heart, get up, he is calling you". So throwing off his cloak he sprang up and came to Jesus and Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said, "Teacher, let me see again." Jesus said to him, "Go, your faith has made you well". Immediately he regained his sight and followed Jesus on the way.

I think that the heart of this text is the very short phrase, "Jesus stood still". All the important Pharisees and scribes and religious people were huddling up next to Jesus but in all of this commotion he stops, listens and hears a human voice that is muffled and completely ignored by the world. It is that inner stillness of Jesus that allowed him to listen to the cry that no-one else paid any attention too, that no-one else cared about.

How many years did Romero pray in silence every morning? But it was that stillness that enabled him to listen, to hear the cry that the world had not heard.

The life of the public Romero that we all know begins, very slowly at first, in 1974, when he is named the bishop of the diocese of Santiago de Maria. Until then Romero has pretty much been an obscure priest doing his job, working with the people, then seven years sitting at a desk, working as secretary of the bishops' conference, typing up homilies for the nuncio, things like that. Santiago de Maria is a highland area, a coffee growing region, a place that in the winter is quite cold. In the coffee season people leave the villages to pick coffee, to earn a little bit of extra money to get through the year. In the first coffee season in his new diocese a local man said to Bishop Romero, "Do you realise that the campesinos who have arrived here to work on the plantations are sleeping on the sidewalks, they are scattered in the plaza at night, they are shivering with the cold?" Romero had been pretty much oblivious to this. He lived in the bishop's house and it hadn't dawned on him that these people were sleeping out at night in the cold. So he asks, "What can be done?" The man tells him, "Look at the big old house up there where the school used to be – why don't you open it up?" He opened it up. 300 people could fit into this house. He also decided to open an empty classroom – another 30 people could sleep there. And then he added a little maternal touch, he give them some hot *atol* or hot milk to drink at night when they came home from picking the coffee beans. The local man remembered that "in the evenings Romero would come up to the house and go around talking and speaking with everyone." And then adds the important words, "and he spent a lot of time listening".

Listening, like Jesus on the way back to Jerusalem from Jericho. Listening, hearing their voices.

One of the most important moments of Romero's life, as we know, was the death of Father Rutilio Grande. After he celebrated the funeral mass of Fr. Rutilio he declared that the following Sunday there would be only one mass celebrated in the entire archdiocese. The other bishops were livid. The nuncio scolded him and called him irresponsible and imprudent.

More than 100,000 people filled the plaza in front of the cathedral in San Salvador that day. Who knows how many were listening on the radio throughout the country. One of those who was there, Fr. Inocencio Alas, describes what happened.

"As the mass began I noticed that Monsenor Romero was sweating, pale, nervous, when he began the homily it seemed slow to me, without his usual eloquence, as if he was reluctant to go through the door of history that God was opening for him".

He is three weeks archbishop, he has come from this small diocese, he is little known and rather bookwormish and not well supported by the priests. "You could see Romero was reluctant to take this step," says Fr Alas, "But after a few minutes I felt the Holy Spirit descend upon him. He said, I want to give public thanks today here in front of the archdiocese for the unified support that is being expressed for the gospel, and for these, our beloved priests, many of them in danger, just like Fr. Grande. When they heard the name of Rutilio, thousands exploded into applause."

"As the people were applauding him," Fr Alas went on, "it seemed as if something rose within him. It was then that Romero crossed that threshold, he went through the door". And then Alas adds this very interesting image, "You know there is baptism by water, and there is baptism by blood. But there is also baptism by the people."

It's a beautiful image. I think we could say that Romero was that day baptised into the people of God. It was a very important moment in his life.



An image from the mural at San Salvador Airport. The placard reads, "my love is the people".

From the gospel of Luke

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers who stripped him, beat him and went away leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite passed on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling came near him and when he saw him he was moved with pity. He went to him, bandaged his wounds, put him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper and said, take care of him and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend. Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the

robbers? He answered, the one who showed him mercy. Jesus said, go and do likewise.

For us who are followers of Jesus, we are invited to remember that that body that is pushed to the edge of our world, our life, our cities, our consciences, is in some ways also Christ. And it was only the Samaritan who had the courage, the attentiveness that comes from listening, to go over and touch the body of Christ, to celebrate Eucharist on the side of the road.

Gustavo Gutierrez has said, "The question, Who is my neighbour? places the one asking the question in the centre. But Jesus turns the question upside down. He responds with another question. Who was the neighbour to the wounded person left alongside the road? The one who was assaulted and left on the side of the road is placed centre stage.

This is a change from seeing the neighbour as an object, one who receives my help, to seeing the neighbour as the subject. Our neighbour is not a person we accidentally bump into along the road, but a person we actively go in search of. The person lying by the side of the road who has been left to die is calling us by name. If I want to be a disciple of Jesus, then I have to move. I have to be displaced, from my world to the world of the other.

Listen to this insight of Archbishop Romero, from one of his homilies from 1978. "There is a criteria for knowing if God is near to us or far away. Whoever cares for the hungry, the naked, the poor, the disappeared, the tortured, the prisoner, anyone who suffers, for that person God is near." This is saying exactly the same thing as Gutierrez, but using different language. If I draw near to the person who is left half dead on the side of the road, then God is near to me. Jesus is the first one who crosses over

to the other side of the road. Jesus is also the body lying in the road.

The incarnation becomes the model for Christian discipleship. God is poured out and becomes small and enters into the world, moving towards us in our broken humanity. So God is the first one who allows himself/herself to be displaced. As Pope Francis says, "God thinks like the Samaritan, who does not pass near the victim feeling sorry for him or for her or looking the other way, but comes to the victim's aid, without asking anything in return." God always takes the first step.

Discipleship requires movement, requires displacement. Romero is saying to us, If we go to help the wounded God, the wounded Christ, then God is near to us. Jesus doesn't skirt around our humanity to reach God. He goes right to where we are, right into our world, right into everything that is human, and in making this journey he turns to us and says, Come and follow me.

In the last couple of years of his life Romero goes deeper and deeper into the option that he has chosen, this "baptism into the people". He goes deeper and deeper into their hearts, into their lives. He puts himself on the edge of the road, where the poor live and die. One gets a sense that once Romero has gone through that door and crossed that threshold, there is no more looking back, no more wondering whether he made the right decision or not. He is not sweating his decisions anymore, he is just being with the people. It is as if the poor are giving Romero the word of God. He is no longer a great preacher who announces this good news to the poor; he becomes a beggar, he becomes a man who listens to the people's voice, listens to their stories. He becomes a poor man in a sense, the

opposite of the man who learnt everything he knew from books. It's almost as if he had to forget everything that he learnt, and to go to the people and say, Touch me, Give me the word of God. Romero is saying, I read the scriptures and then I go out and I look at the people; I listen to the people and then I know what I am supposed to say. It is a whole new moment in his life.

Romero knows that this poor, broken person, these poor, crucified people, have the word of God that he needs. He crosses to the side of the road so that he can receive the word of God from them. "And if some day they take away our radio station from us" - which in the end they did, they blew it up - "if they close down our newspaper, if they don't let us speak, if they kill all the priests and the bishops too, and you are left, a people without priests, each one of you must be God's microphone. Each one of you must be a messenger, a prophet. My voice will disappear, but the word which is Christ, will remain in the hearts of those who have wanted to receive it."

This is a very powerful transformation. At the end of Romero's life he has discovered that the poor are the prophets and he can only speak what they give to him to speak. He listens, listens, listens to the people and they give him the word he speaks.



(Fr. Brian Pierce, OP. at the beatification ceremony)

If you would like to see Fr. Brian Pierce OP speaking at the Romero lecture at Blackfriars in Oxford, there is a short, 7 minute film on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmLjXYmR-so>

ROMERO IN ST. ALBANS

David Skidmore reports on the newly installed statues of martyrs in St. Alban's Cathedral, amongst whom is celebrated Oscar Romero.



(Photo: Julia Low)

The long-awaited statues of martyrs were installed in the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban in the weeks after Easter. Rory Young has carved seven wonderful statues to fill the niches behind the Nave Altar. St Alban obviously takes the central place and he is flanked by Amphibalus, who brought him to Christian faith, two martyrs from the Reformation era - the Benedictine St Alban Roe and the Protestant George Tankerfield - and, from the twentieth century, Elisabeth of Russia, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Oscar Romero.

By a happy coincidence the first time I saw all the statues in place was at Pentecost – the day after the beatification in San Salvador – and I was delighted to see that our Dean had arranged for a candle to be lit and flowers laid in front of the statue of Blessed Oscar Romero.

The reaction of most people – visitors and parishioners alike – has been very positive. The

statues are painted – as we can assume the originals would have been – but that comes as a surprise to some visitors. Nevertheless, many people say that they had assumed they ‘had always been there’ which is, I think, a tribute to Rory Young’s skill in fitting each one so perfectly into its niche. My own view is that some of the ‘close up’ photographs give a misleading and almost harsh impression and that the seven statues are best seen away from the sanctuary in the Nave – where anyone attending a service would normally see them. We hope that many more people will visit the Cathedral to see the martyrs for themselves and to reflect on their significance. Further information is available on the website stalbanscathedral.org (click on ‘Nave Screen Statues’ from the Home page). There is also a small exhibition which provides details of the way in which Rory Young responded to his challenging commission and executed it so brilliantly. We learn, for example, that each statue is carved from one tonne of Caen stone (the same stone used by the builders of the Norman Abbey).

As I write this we are preparing for Albantide. On 20 June the annual Alban Pilgrimage starts with a procession through the City to remind St Albans how it got its name. This year, with the arrival of the statues, we will have reason to remember all those other Christians from the time of Britain’s first martyr right up to our own, and from many countries, who have given their lives as witnesses for the faith. This year the Archbishop of Canterbury will preach at the Eucharist and the Archbishop of Rouen, Mgr Jean-Charles Descubes, will preach at Evensong. Their presence forms part of *Dedication 900* – celebrating the fact that our Cathedral stands on one of the oldest sites of continuous Christian worship in Britain and also the fact that the Norman Abbey was completed and dedicated (by Geoffrey, Archbishop of Rouen) in 1115 in the presence of King Henry I

and Queen Matilda. Plans are still being finalised for an event, later this year, to celebrate the original dedication and to bless the new statues. Among the many prayers offered that day will be ‘Blessed Oscar Romero, Pray for us!’

(Photo: Julia Low)



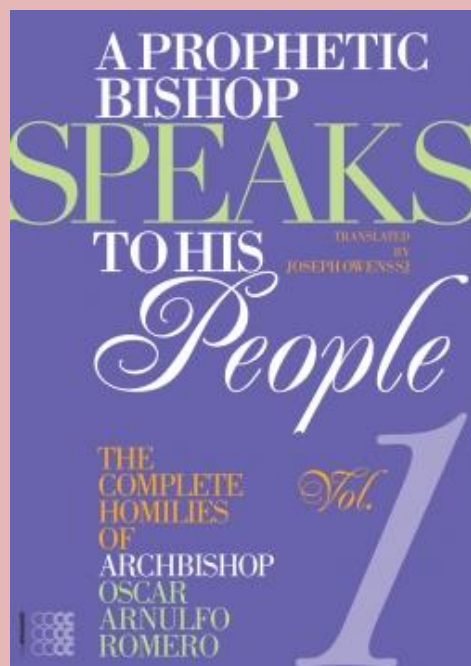
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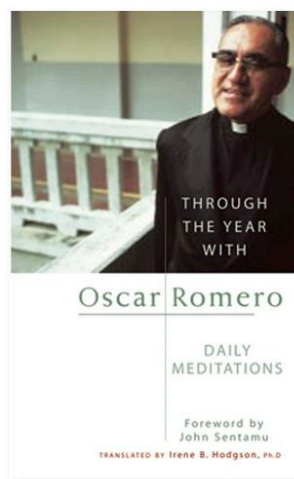
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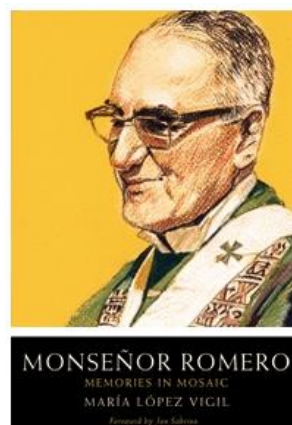
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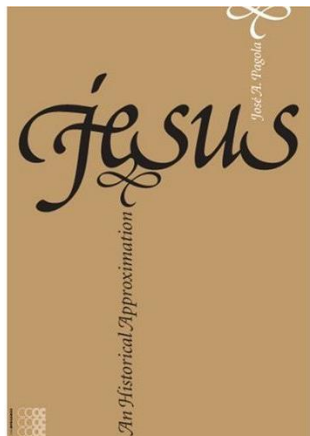


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Thank you.



Copy of the monstrance presented to the Pope by former President Mauricio Funes, containing a fragment of Blessed Romero's bloodstained alb. The red book is a copy of the "Positio", the official position paper from the Vatican on Romero's beatification. Both valued treasures of the Carmelite Sisters of Saint Teresa who run the Divine Providence Cancer Hospital where Oscar Romero lived and died.

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