

# Romeronews

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## DEO GRATIAS

**Blessed Oscar Romero**

**Blessed Pope Paul VI**

**Saints Together**

**14 October 2018**



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## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

### **Romero's 101 Birthday Mass**

Saturday 11 August

12:30 St George's Cathedral, Southwark

Celebrant: Archbishop Edward Adams,  
the Papal Nuncio.

Followed by reception in Amigo Hall

### **Canonisation of Oscar Romero**

Sunday 14 October

Rome

### **National Mass of Thanksgiving for Canonisation of St Oscar Romero**

Saturday 3 November

12:30 St George's Cathedral, Southwark

Organised in conjunction with the  
Bishops' Conference of England and  
Wales.

Archbishop Peter Smith will preside and  
Archbishop Bernard Longley will preach

### **Solemn Evensong in Thanksgiving for the Canonisation of St Romero**

Saturday 17 November

15:00 Westminster Abbey

Cardinal Vincent will give the address

## ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO SAINT AT LAST!

**CANONISATION IN ROME  
SUNDAY 14 OCTOBER**

*Julian Filochowski updates us with the news we have all been waiting for!*



*A banner for the beatification ceremony in 2015 reads "Romero: Martyr for Love"*

Pope Francis has announced that the canonisation of Archbishop Oscar Romero will happen in a ceremony in St Peter's Square on the morning of Sunday 14 October during the Synod on Young People, which takes place in Rome during that month. Great joy erupted at the declaration - not only in El Salvador, Romero's own country, but across the world. The new Salvadoran Cardinal, Gregorio Rosa Chavez,

declared that he will no longer be hailed as 'St Romero of America' but as 'St Romero of the World'. It sounded at first like a rhetorical flourish; but, on reflection, it's a simple statement of the truth for he will be a saint of the Catholic (meaning universal) Church.

**Romero**, who is described as **the first martyr of Vatican II**, will be proclaimed a saint together with Pope Paul VI, who brought the Second Vatican Council to its conclusion and implemented its reforms. Romero had great affection for Paul VI; and he in turn gave Romero unconditional and uncritical support during very difficult times.

In the same canonisation ceremony four others will be sanctified: two Italian priests, Francesco Spinelli and Vincenzo Romano and two religious sisters, one German and one Spanish, Catherine Kasper and Nazaria Ignacia March Mesa. The crowds in St Peter's Square and the surrounds will be huge for such a great occasion.

Many who admire and revere Blessed Oscar Romero have already indicated

that they will travel to Rome to be present at the event. The Archbishop Romero Trust will try to offer guidance to those who have worked and prayed for the canonisation and who now wish to be present and to participate. This is being done in conjunction with Anthony Coles who has organised pilgrimages to the martyrdom site and holy places associated with Oscar Romero in El Salvador – as well as regularly taking groups to Rome.

Although the date for the canonisation is now known, details of other activities that usually accompany such events have still to be announced. These might possibly include a prayer vigil and a celebratory Mass of Thanksgiving (on the Monday morning) in one of the major basilicas in Rome.

The Archbishop Romero Trust in Britain is proposing to order tickets for the canonisation Mass and will hope to be able to provide them to the members of its 'Friends of Romero' network who have indicated that they plan to go to Rome for the canonisation Mass.

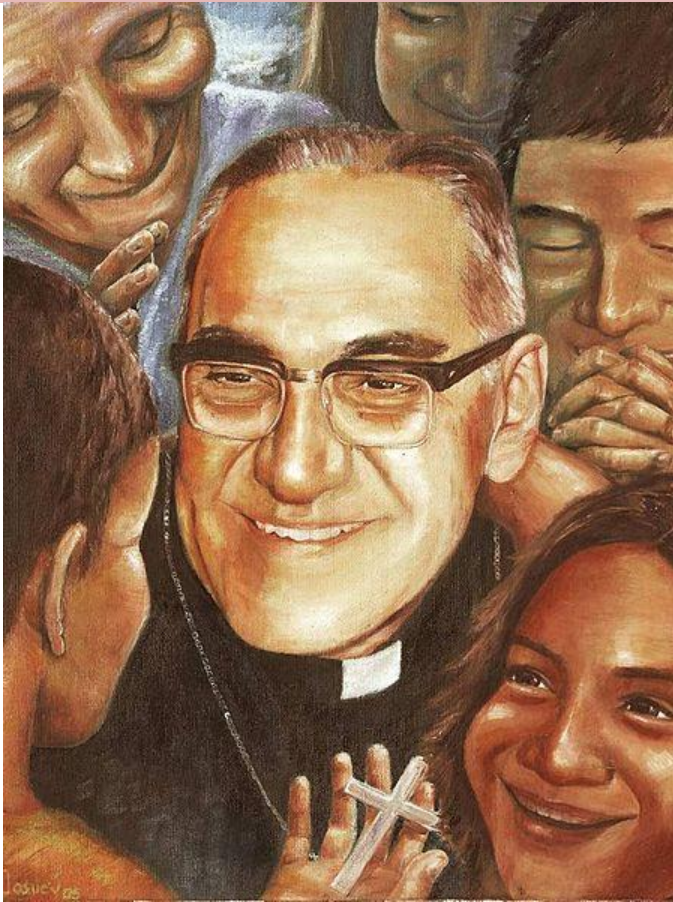
Whether making a lightning visit simply for the canonisation ceremony itself, or even if staying a little longer for other events, many or most people can make their own arrangements for flights to Rome and also for overnight accommodation there. They will then be able to collect a ticket for entry to the Mass from a location in Rome on the day before.

However, as an alternative, a two and three night 'package' is available (which will include accommodation, receptions, some meals, tickets and transfers to the various events) and can be booked through Anthony Coles.

**For either of these it is important to register interest immediately with Anthony Coles** by email to [arctc@btinternet.com](mailto:arctc@btinternet.com) or in writing to [18 Maresfield Gardens, London NW3 5SX](#).



## CELEBRATING SAINT ROMERO



How will you celebrate Romero's canonisation? Why not join a national thanksgiving prayer celebration (details below). We have heard some dioceses are planning local thanksgiving celebrations. Many places are also considering a Vigil on the Eve of the Canonisation (Saturday 13 October). If you are involved in organising a diocesan event, let Romero Trust know the details and we can advertise it on the Romero Trust website.

## National Celebrations – all are welcome

Saturday 3 November 2018

12.30 in St George's Cathedral, Southwark

### **National Mass of Thanksgiving**

Organised by the Romero Trust in conjunction with the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales. Archbishop Peter Smith will preside and Archbishop Bernard Longley will preach.

Saturday 17 November 2018

15.00 in Westminster Abbey

**Solemn Evensong in Thanksgiving for the Canonisation of St Oscar Romero.** Cardinal Vincent Nichols will give the Address.

### **And don't forget Happy Birthday Romero in August!**

Saturday 11 August 2018

12.30 in St George's Cathedral.

Mass to mark the anniversary of Romero's birth 101 years ago, celebrated by Archbishop Edward Adams, the Papal Nuncio. Followed by reception in Amigo Hall.

## ROMERO PILGRIMAGE – NOVEMBER 2019?



Crystalline lakes, sapphire skies, verdant landscapes, smoking volcanoes, colonial villages, colourful art. These are maybe not the first things that spring to mind when El Salvador is mentioned. But these are features that also remain in the visitor's memory, alongside the tragic history and the challenging present of the tiny country known as the "Tom Thumb of the Americas".

At the Romero Trust we have organised three pilgrimages to El Salvador: in 2010, 2013 and 2017. We hadn't really imagined that we would be organising any more. But the imminent canonisation of Blessed Oscar Romero has given us pause for thought. Now that

our patron saint has been recognised by the universal church, we were wondering if there are friends of Romero who would love to have the opportunity to visit his country of birth and the holy sites of his life and martyrdom. More than ninety "Romero Pilgrims" have already made that journey with us and have been inspired by the warmth and resilience of its people, the beauty of the countryside and the chance to meet with close friends and colleagues of Romero.

Some feedback from our 2017 pilgrims tells its own story:

*"I could never have anticipated the power of the journey we have had."*

*"Wonderful gift and grace: absolutely loved it: marvellous experience."*

*"It gave opportunity for growth and stretching: pace fantastic: gives food for reflection for a long time and spells a new phase in my life."*

*"Various speakers were brilliant, and we met them in the right order, starting with the Hospitalito and widening out to martyrs and people."*

*"Meeting Salvadoran people – Eva, Dorila, children, cooperatives. Lovely: hope to come back."*

*"Incredibly powerful, particularly Anita Ortiz and El Mozote."*

*"Lots of linkages made to the culture of the country."*

*"Culmination of my life's experience in Latin America: Peru and El Salvador came full circle."*

*"Pace was excellent: felt we were not rushed."*

*"Thanks to the group, great to have people from different parts of the world."*

*"Grateful for depth and insight and shared experience."*

*"Food was brilliant, great to have a Salvadoran diet. Really got to understand life of the people."*

*"What to do now? Need to tell our story and that of El Salvador."*

Let us know if you might be interested in becoming a Romero pilgrim. If the visit goes ahead it is likely that it will be an eleven-day trip in mid-November 2019. This would coincide with a special time in the country: the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Martyrs of the UCA, the six Jesuit priests and their two women colleagues killed in 1989. The all-inclusive costs of the visit would be around £1,800.

## PILGRIMAGE MEMORIES

*We wouldn't want to influence your opinion on whether or not a pilgrimage in 2019 would be a good idea, but...*

*One of the Romero pilgrims in November 2017 was Steve Atherton, Justice and Peace worker for the Liverpool Archdiocese, who travelled with his wife Ann.*

*Steve produced a beautifully illustrated report of the trip. This is a short extract.*

We visited the Wall of Remembrance where the names of the dead and the disappeared are engraved in a large dark marble wall. Monseñor appears fairly near the beginning of the 70,000 names because the civil war erupted into ferocious violence after his death. There are thousands whose names are not known and therefore not recorded.

We were met by José Lazo Romero a young lawyer, known as Chepe, who is tracing the abducted children who were offered for adoption to families outside of El Salvador so that they can be reunited with their birth families. These are often the children of adults who were murdered or otherwise 'disappeared' by



the military. Chepe is an inspirational speaker and he and his music group led us in song and coaxed us into shouting slogans.



In El Salvador, Oscar Romero is universally known as Monseñor. From the Wall of Remembrance, we went to the cathedral and down into the crypt where Monseñor is buried, a man who had devoted his life to the search for justice as it is presented in the gospels and the scriptures. Monseñor is a model of how to use the scriptures and church tradition as our filter for deciding what is just/unjust, what is loving/unloving, and what is reconciliatory/antagonistic. The current archbishop seems to be worried that a cult of Oscar Romero has developed but Romero is not a threat to Christ! Romero is an image of Christ who

inspires us to try to behave likewise. His episcopal motto was “Sentir con la Iglesia”: “Think with the mind of the Church”.



For copies of Steve's illustrated report please contact him directly:

Tel: 0151 5221080

**[s.atherton@rcaol.co.uk](mailto:s.atherton@rcaol.co.uk)**

NB: Steve has offered to give a talk illustrated with slides to any interested group or parish.



## WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT ROMERO?

*We asked Professor Michael E. Lee, author of 'Revolutionary Saint – The theological legacy of Oscar Romero', what he thinks is so special about Romero. This is his reply.*

Karl Rahner, the great Jesuit theologian, famously argued that with Vatican II the Catholic Church entered a new era in which it became a truly global Church. With the canonization of Oscar Romero, it now has a saint who not only represents our world today, but is a guide for how one can live an authentic Christian life in the face of important global challenges.

### Conversion

Romero is one of the great examples of conversion in our day. This might sound odd considering that he was a lifelong Roman Catholic who began studies for the priesthood as a teenager. Yet, we see a radical change in his life when at age 59, he became Archbishop of San Salvador.

While he had always been charitable to the poor, Romero became aware of the structural causes of poverty and how those demanded something new from him. In the face of violence unleashed against any who would speak up for justice, Romero became the most prominent voice in his country denouncing that violence and defending human rights.

Romero's conversion was not so much the rejection of his earlier life or faith, but a deepening of them. Romero's life-long quest for God gained a new depth when he discovered God in the reality of the poor. Struggling against sin was not just a personal endeavour but a call to fight against the ways that other people were being deprived of their God-given dignity. Romero recognized that ignorance and privilege can blind good people to the ways that sin dominates our world. He calls all people to that awareness of the reality of the poor and marginalized and confronts us with the daily demand to conversion—a conversion that both “turns away” from that sin, and “turns toward” full communion with our neighbours and God.

## **Discipleship**

Both in his own life and as the head of the institutional church in his country, Romero placed the reality of the poor as the central focus for Christian discipleship. In doing so, he demonstrated the necessary political dimension of faith.

Unfortunately, in centuries past, it seemed the main calling of the Christian was to turn away from the world and its problems, looking within and disdaining everything, and everyone, who was other. During his ministry, Romero was often criticized by his opponents, even fellow Catholics, for “meddling in politics.” He was told to stay in his place and only talk about “spiritual” things. This was simply inadequate for today’s world and the demands of the gospel to bring good news to it.

Oscar Romero dedicated himself to prayer, devoted himself to serving God, and saw both of those tasks as having profoundly political dimensions. Poverty, human rights abuses, and injustice were not ‘worldly’ problems to be ignored, or even secondary questions to those of

faith. No, Romero became convinced that the question about faith and politics was not “if” but “how,” and that “how” was found in the world of the poor.

Though always wary of how political parties and ideologies can become idols, Romero shows how discipleship, the living out of one’s faith commitment, must have a political dimension that attempts to make the world more like the reign of God that Jesus preached.

## **Martyrdom**

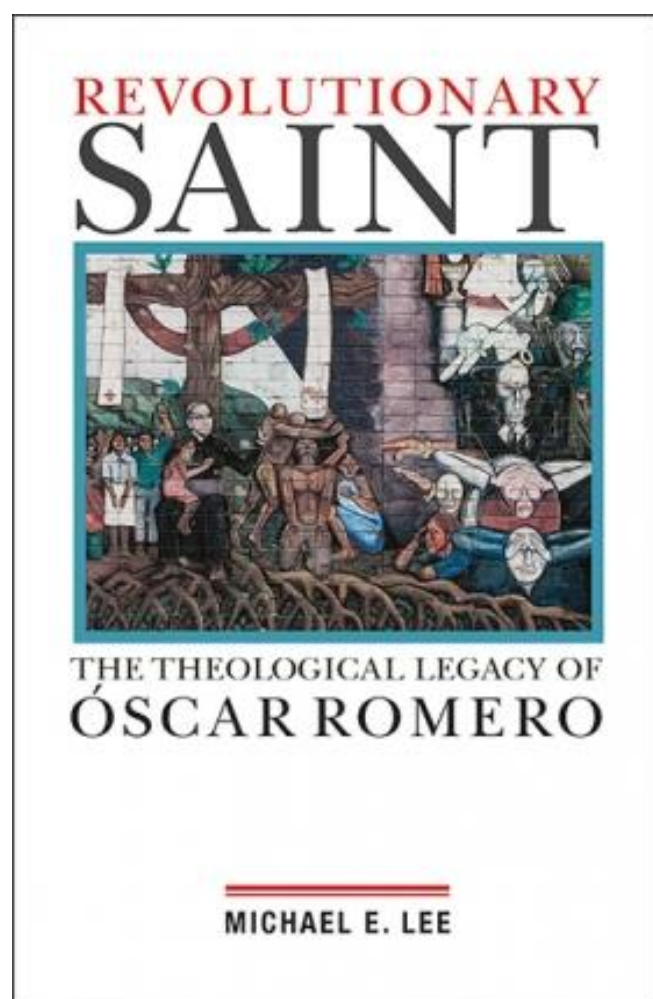
In one of the great dramas of Christian history, the twentieth century could be called the century of martyrs. Oscar Romero helps us to understand the meaning of martyrdom today in new ways.

Even before his assassination, Romero was linked to martyrdom because he presided over the funeral masses of many who were killed for their faithful struggles against injustice. These martyrs inspired Romero to continue his ministry with courage even as the death threats against him intensified each day.

Traditionally, if a martyr's death is understood as "in hatred of the faith," then Romero's case demonstrates how many martyrs today are killed for a faith that does justice. They should inspire us all to protect the lives of those working for a better world and to join in those efforts as a genuine calling of the faith.

As Pope Francis has made clear, our world is characterized by grave inequality that stems from unjust structures and retains the scars of colonization and slavery. Followers of Christ must live and proclaim an authentic good news to those who are poor and marginalized today. Their spirituality must be one that unites the love of God and neighbour and sees the face of Christ in the many who are crucified. Oscar Romero, murdered for his courageous defence of human rights, offers inspiration for this great challenge by giving new meaning to conversion, discipleship, and martyrdom. He is a saint for our times.

***Revolutionary Saint – The theological Legacy of Oscar Romero*** by Michael E. Lee. Orbis Books. This recently-published volume is highly recommended by the Romero Trust. It is available in bookshops at £20 per copy. But it can be purchased from the Romero Trust at the special price of £13.00 (post free).





## GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE – WHERE IS ROMERO?



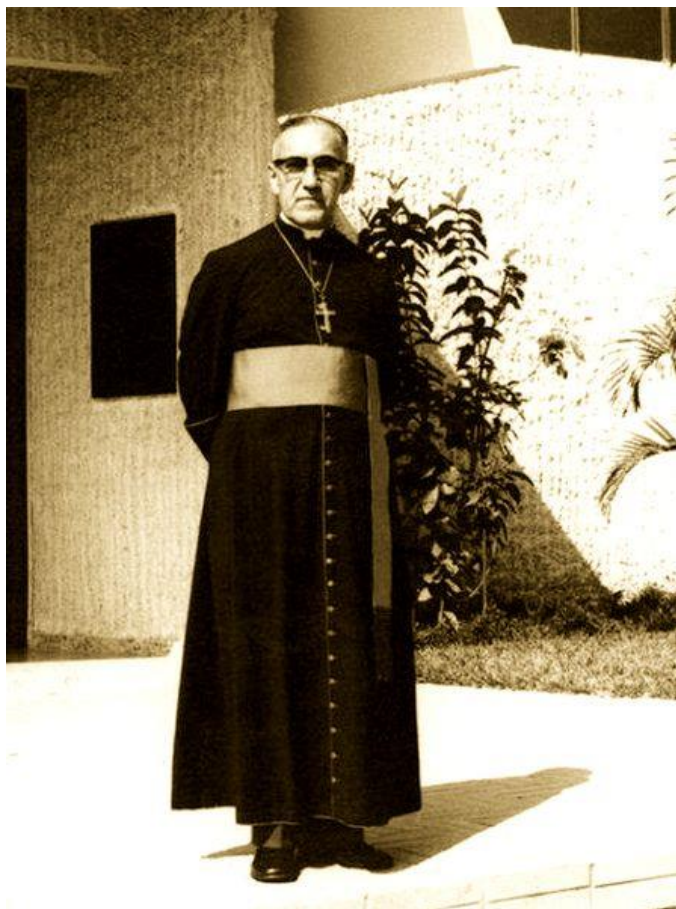
Carlos Colorado publishes the SuperMartyrio blog in Spanish and English: [polycarpi.blogspot.com](http://polycarpi.blogspot.com) . You can also follow his Twitter feed: @SuperMartyrio . Here he reflects on the most recent apostolic exhortation by Pope Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, and puzzles over why Romero does not receive a mention in it.

Why is Archbishop Oscar Romero not mentioned in the new apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* by Pope Francis? The other important saints raised to the altars by Pope Francis are named in the document—John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Paul VI, the “Gaucha Priest” of Argentina—they are all accounted for. The great absentee is Romero, who could very well be the most prominent saint of the pontificate. *But, why?*

After considering all the reasons, the only answer that makes sense is that Romero is not mentioned in the document because ***Romero is the interpretive key to reading it.*** As Jesus is to the Old Testament (C.f., John 5, 39-40), Romero is for *Gaudete* like a companion piece that helps us understand the document, like a decrypting device that comes separate from the message to be deciphered, or a password that does not appear in the material to which it gives access. Romero does not appear in *Gaudete*, but we cannot understand its message without him: after Romero’s canonization, we will not be able to talk about his holiness and this exhortation on holiness, without relating the two, especially because they were given to us by the same Pope in the same year!

A large part of the text of the exhortation seems directly to relate to Romero’s figure. *Gaudete* gives great emphasis to the themes of martyrdom and persecution that immediately bring to mind Romero. In fact, the very title of the document is derived from the words of Christ to victims of persecution: “*‘Rejoice and be glad,’ Jesus tells those*

*persecuted or humiliated for his sake.”*  
[G.E., 1; Mt 5:12.]



When the martyrdom of Fr Rutilio Grande was quickly followed by the assassination of Fr Alfonso Navarro, Blessed Romero experienced persecution and humiliation on the one hand, but also joy and evangelical rejoicing. *“With respect, admiration, and gratitude, with the love of a brother I take up the life and the example of Father Alfonso this morning and I tell him: this pearl is the glory of our community, the beautiful crown of our Diocese,”* Romero said. ***“This pearl is the light that***

***invites us to give witness to holiness, truth, and unity.”*** [May 11, 1978 Homily.] In *Gaudete*, Francis quotes St John Paul II, who spoke of martyrdom as *“a heritage which speaks more powerfully than all the causes of division”* among Christians. [G.E., 9.] (The quote was from a commemoration presided over by the Polish Pope which honoured Romero, among others.)

*Gaudete* does not only point to Romero, however, for shedding of blood for the faith—because Francis wants us to understand that there may be other martyrdoms that impact us all. *“Persecutions are not a reality of the past, for today too we experience them, whether by the shedding of blood, as is the case with so many contemporary martyrs, or by more subtle means, by slander and lies,”* he writes. [G.E., 94.] This directly implicates Romero. *“Archbishop Romero’s martyrdom did not occur precisely at the moment of his death,”* Francis told a delegation of Salvadoran pilgrims in 2015; *“it was a martyrdom of witness, of previous suffering, of previous persecution, until his death. But also afterwards because,*

*after he died — I was a young priest and I witnessed this — he was defamed, slandered, soiled, that is, his martyrdom continued even by his brothers in the priesthood and in the episcopate.”* (Oct. 30, 2015 audience.)

Just as we can be victimized by such “*slander and lies,*” we must not fall into the sin of spreading them. “*The other harmful ideological error is found in those who find suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist,*” he writes. [G.E., 101.] Again, this implicates Romero, as the Pope had explicitly recognised previously. On that occasion, he remarked, “*I recall in my own country many, many men and women, fine consecrated people, not ideologues, but who would say: ... ‘he’s a communist, throw him out!’ And they would cast them out; they would persecute them. **Just think of Blessed Romero**”.* (May 23, 2017 reflection.)

Elsewhere in *Gaudete*, Francis points to the Beatitudes as the keys to holiness. “*Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with*

*him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace.”* [G.E., 25.] The Pope recognized this trait in Romero in the decree for his beatification, in which Francis describes him as a “*Heroic witness of the Kingdom of God— Kingdom of justice, brotherhood and peace.*”

Francis urges a holiness that embraces poverty and rejects materiality, because “*Wealth ensures nothing. Indeed, once we think we are rich, we can become so self-satisfied that we leave no room for God’s word[.]*” [G.E., 68.] This, too, evokes Romero, who paraphrased Jesus to say: “*Blessed are you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours. You are the ones most able to understand what is not understood by those who are on their knees before and trust in false idols. You who do not have those idols, you who do not put your trust in them because you have no money or power, you who are destitute of everything, know that the poorer you are, the more you possess God’s kingdom[.]*” [February 17, 1980 Homily.]



Finally, Francis reaches a conclusion that we could call the Romeroesque synthesis of *Gaudete* when he states: “*We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.*” [G.E., 101.] Romero summed up this point even more succinctly: “*it is not God’s will for some to have everything and others to have nothing.*” [September 10, 1978 Homily.]

In conclusion, «*Gaudete et Exsultate*» is the word of encouragement that Christ left to the persecuted and Pope Francis’ exhortation of the same name enshrines the call to holiness that Blessed Romero lived out. Francis does not omit Romero in the exhortation to avoid controversy, because a number of passages of the exhortation have created controversy, showing that Pope Francis is not afraid of disagreements. Nor does he hold back to protect Romero: the record is peppered with multiple instances in which Francis has explicitly referred to Romero to illustrate these very points. Finally, it was

not an oversight, because the citations in the text are extensive (they include examples as varied as María Gabriela Sagheddu, Charles de Foucauld, Paul Miki, Andrew Kim Taegon, Francis Xavier Nguyễn van Thuân and the Latin American martyrs Roque Gonzalez and Alfonso Rodriguez).

Instead, the silence on Romero seems more like a purposeful evasion that calls our attention to the excluded subject, like the stars help us see the outline of the new moon when the lunar disk is not visible to the naked eye.

## PEACE: THE PRODUCT OF JUSTICE AND LOVE

*Rubén Zamora’s Address at the Ecumenical Service in St Martin in the Fields. London Romero Week 2018: 17 March*

Sisters and brothers in Jesus Christ, we hope, and we believe, that Oscar Romero will be canonized this year. But I have to tell you, we do not wish him to be reduced to a plaster saint. Nor do we

want his teaching and his legacy to be diluted into sickly 'comfort food'.

When Romero became archbishop, El Salvador was in crisis. Violent conflict erupted, and civil war was on the horizon. Monseñor Romero became our prophet. A Prophet of peace. And an advocate of justice. We desperately need his prophetic witness today, in crisis-ridden El Salvador, and perhaps too, I will humbly suggest, in Britain and across the world.

Throughout history, the prophetic path is one of the most radical expressions of God's presence in our lives. And it's possible to establish a line of continuity, starting from the Old Testament prophets, as they showed prophesy to be an inseparable part of the relationship with God, and a vehicle of communication between God and his people. And then on to Jesus, as a prophet, opening a new period in history. And then come our contemporary prophets, amongst whom Monseñor Romero has a prominent place. We have heard the words of the prophet Isaiah in one of today's readings. My endeavour

now is to reflect on the prophetic message of Romero. Romero as a prophet of peace and justice.

We must note that, even before the church today is recognising Archbishop Romero as a saint, he has already been declared a martyr. And martyrdom is one of the most common virtues associated with the gift of prophecy.

### **What are the characteristics of a prophet?**

In the first place, the appearance of prophets tends to come in periods of crisis. In the Bible it is during foreign domination, or when the people abandoned their alliance with God, or when involved in war or suffering a tyranny. This was the social and political environment for the birth of Jesus. And, for our Romero, it is exactly in that setting that his prophetic voice appears in our history. When his message started to develop, it was in a deep crisis of the military regime that had dominated the country for nearly half a century - sustaining its power on human right violations, miserable poverty and facing

a growing social unrest. Romero clearly perceived that our society was on the path to civil war. And he became involved in desperate efforts to stop it. At the international level he sent an Open Letter to President Carter. He spoke privately to military leaders but publicly addressed the government and the popular organizations. I was a witness of many of those initiatives.

Secondly, the Prophet is usually chosen by God from among the common people, and from outside the religious apparatus. In the Old Testament we have many examples of this. But the best example is Jesus, coming from a family of very low income - and born in a stable. In the Christian churches the situation is more mixed, some of the Prophets come from the ranks of the clergy and tend to be very critical of the official church.

In this sense, we could say that Romero is a clear example of the prophet insofar as his parents were common people, living a very modest life in a small town. And he became a prophet after he was consecrated archbishop. In the history of Catholicism, we have 'Saint' bishops and

we have 'heretic' bishops; but very few prophetic bishops. In Romero, one of the most original characteristics of his prophetic ministry was his fidelity to the Church. As Pope Francis has said, Romero was a martyr during his life, in his death - but also after it. That is because, as Pope Francis reminds us, he was attacked with the weapon of the tongue. He suffered incomprehension, insults and even hatred, including from priests and bishops. Nevertheless, he remained faithful to his episcopal motto: "to think and feel with the Church". Never, in his sermons or pastoral letters, is there a word of denunciation in response to this - no matter the pain his brother bishops made him suffer.

The third characteristic of the prophet is that their mission opens with an extraordinary call from God that changes their life. In the Old Testament, usually the call was made directly by God. Then, God himself sent his own Son in the person of Jesus. And in the case of Romero, it was a personal confrontation with the brutality of the regime, the assassination of Father Rutilio Grande, his close spiritual friend.



A fourth characteristic is that the prophet is involved in the lives of the people. Romero had a simple lifestyle. He refused to live at the archbishop's residence; and instead he lived in 2 rooms at the hospital for people with terminal cancer. Every single week he went out visiting the poor communities; and he was habitually telling them "you are my nourishment".

Romero's central theme was the suffering of the oppressed - which was leading inevitably to civil war. His conclusion was that a society can only merit being called Christian if social justice reigns in human relations. That is why he used to say: "I am the voice of the ones who have no voice". His aspiration was a society with no social injustice, in other words what we call the construction of the kingdom of God. And for him, the response of Jesus to Pilate has this meaning. Unless we now work towards the building of a 'different world' then "My Kingdom is not of this world".

In the same vein, when he talks to rich and powerful people his discourse is not to condemn. But rather, to stress the

equality of all, that we are all children of God - and therefore we have the responsibility to care for all. Romero was a constant critic of the extreme inequality of our society, of the consumerist habits we have adopted. He went so far as to warn the rich with a metaphor: "it is better to take off and give away your rings than to risk your fingers".

At the same time, his prophetic message always incorporates the vision of a different future and a path to achieve it. This is the essence of the message from the Sermon on the Mount - denunciation of injustice and offering of hope. In this sense, the prophetic discourse in the Old Testament, and in Jesus, is followed by Romero. In his sermons and pastoral letters, the criticism of the political and social illness of Salvadoran society, was invariably followed by a call to committed Christians for action to change it - and an expression of hope in the possibilities of achieving such a change.

A fifth characteristic of the prophetic task is the role of developing the consciousness of the people. Romero is instrumental in the conscientisation of

our people. Because in a critical crisis situation, it is absolutely necessary that society becomes conscious of the need for change. Romero's fundamental task as Prophet was to lay bare the reality to all; denounce injustice; and contrast them with the teachings of Yahweh and to demand its fulfilment - just as Isaiah was doing more than 2000 years ago.

Romero's prophetic discourse is a very direct one. It uses a language that the common people could understand so that there was clarity as to whom he was directing the criticism and how any Christian should act. Romero's sermons were frequently interrupted by applause from the community. It was their way to say, "Yes Monseñor, we understand and we agree".

But at the same time this discourse ignited the fury of those who felt accused by Archbishop Romero; or felt a contradiction with their religion. And it led them to try to silence his voice. The official language of our church has the tendency to be more interested in fidelity to doctrine and tradition than to communicating and educating the

people. These days, when I hear Pope Francis speaking, I remember the language of Monseñor Romero and I feel myself closer to the church.

Every Sunday Mass, Romero's sermon started with a review of the events of the week – the good news and then the bad news. The human rights violations, the lists of tortured or disappeared persons, the corruption in society and the government, and the claims of workers for decent wages. Then came his commentary on those facts, using the Gospel as the guide. And finally, came the call for action as the responsibility of all Christians - and usually, an expression of hope for a better time.

Monseñor Romero's life and message is a challenge to all of us. To honour his memory is to follow his teachings and his praxis. This is surely the only genuine way to keep him alive in our societies. The canonization that we are waiting for is no more than the church confirming that his path is the right and proper way for a Christian to live. Therefore, as Christians, the question is: if Romero were alive today what message would he

be giving us, to encourage us and to express, share and act with our brothers and sisters as prophets of peace and justice.

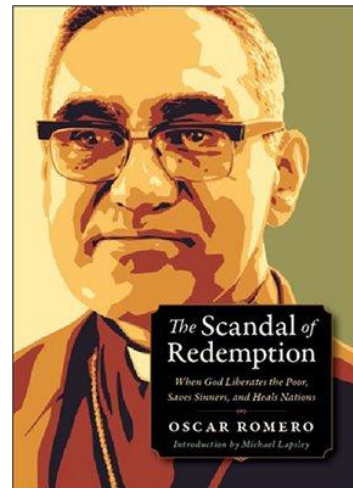
As Christians, the prophetic vein is a consequence of being followers of Jesus Christ, and to have Monseñor Romero as a saint is the church telling the world that he is an example to be followed by all of us.

We live in a world that is in crisis, too many violations of human rights, too much violent conflict, too much inequality between and inside nations, too much disrespect for Mother Earth. Our societies are clamouring for justice and peace. I believe we must ask Saint Romero to illuminate our mission and ministry; and to give us the courage to denounce grotesque injustice in the street and across the planet; to reject the paths of violence and counter violence, and therefore lay the foundations to build sustainable peace - as we strive and struggle to find the kingdom of God. He will surely hear us and give us the understanding, the will and the perseverance to make our contribution to

this great task – which is being an active part of the biggest miracle of history: the construction of God's kingdom. Amen.

## OSCAR ROMERO: MARTYR AND SAINT

*The new book 'The Scandal of Redemption' from Plough Press is reviewed here by Cardinal Gerhard Müller, the former Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome. It is a very important article indeed and deserves*



*wide circulation in the Church. Since he stepped down from his Vatican post, Cardinal Müller has more than once expressed criticism of Pope Francis' teaching from a conservative perspective. But in this reflective piece he insists that Archbishop Romero is a saint for the whole Church – for conservatives and liberals alike. It constitutes a clear warning to those on the right that Romero's canonisation must not be brought into the ongoing arguments between different factions in the Church over Pope Francis' ministry.*

As the disciples were on their way to the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper, Jesus told them, “All of you will be scandalized because of me this night, for it is written in scripture, I will smite the shepherds and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.” Some two thousand years later, on the evening of March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero began to say Mass at the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital in San Salvador. As he finished preaching the homily and turned toward the altar, he was shot. The day before, the archbishop had called for the Salvadoran army to refuse to carry out any more extra-judicial killings ordered by the Junta. Earlier that month, he had anticipated the consequences of this public act. “You can tell them, if they succeed in killing me, then I pardon them, and I bless those who may carry out the killing.”

Romero’s death, like that of Christ, remains a stumbling block. The gospel is not a tidy theory that explains the world, a spiritual technique for facing life’s challenges, or a program whereby mankind can redeem itself—by violence

or by peace. No, the Cross contradicts all who attempt to decipher the world without God or to submit it to human control. It urges us to place our trust in him to whom we owe our life and being. That the Innocent One should suffer and die for the guilty is the ultimate scandal of human history. God’s grace alone frees us from sin and enables us to collaborate in building his kingdom.

*The Scandal of Redemption* leads us to the heart of the mystery of Christ. Jesus did not bring about the brotherhood of man on the basis of good will and fine ideals. He was neither an aesthete nor an enthusiast, neither a Neoplatonist nor a Freemason. He was certainly not a hippie do-gooder. What Christ proclaims is the ultimate turning toward the good. His summons is addressed to everyone: “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel!” Only through the Cross can we understand the paradoxical words of Jesus, God’s peace-bringer: “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). His peace is entirely different from the peace of this world, which is built on the



basis of political, ideological, and military power, like the Pax Romana. Jesus brings us God's peace, making anew heaven and earth by making us anew.

This volume consists of excerpts from Archbishop Romero's diary interspersed with passages from his homilies in which he denounces injustice and calls murder and torture by their names. He preaches to the oppressed and to men of violence alike, pointing them to the gospel of redemption and liberation. Romero does not offer edifying thoughts that, while they might give our souls a temporary lift, do nothing to confront us with the radical call to discipleship. Nor does he select isolated biblical texts in order to validate a prefabricated ideology. He eschews the kind of propaganda that intoxicates a demagogue.

Romero's message is the Catholic faith, attested to in holy Scripture and explicitly taught in the baptismal profession of faith: We believe in God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He describes the Earth as our “shared

house,” a field that, together, we must plough. We do not wait until death to enter the kingdom of God. Christianity is not a religion of the beyond. But as Romero knew, neither is it a religion of the here-and-now, a pious disposition aimed at improving living conditions. The kingdom of God overcomes this false dualism of “beyond” and “here-and-now,” of present and future, theory and practice, because Jesus is the God-Man. In him the fullness of time has come. The pilgrim Church points to the coming glory, while insisting upon our responsibility in the world.

Because of his powerful witness on behalf of the poor, Romero's ministry has been drawn into the struggle over the meaning of liberation and the future of Catholic theology. In the battle between reaction and progress, right and left, Romero has been hijacked by one side. This tempts the other to denounce him as an example of the Marxist infiltration of liberation theology. (In the eyes of some, anyone who shows solidarity with the poor automatically comes under suspicion of being a crypto-communist.) Or he is

accused of allowing himself to be duped into pulling the wagon of a godless ideology and murderous politics. It is no better when he is mindlessly celebrated and misunderstood by those who consider themselves modern, up-to-the-minute Christians simply because their minds have become befuddled with socialist utopian notions.

We shall never do justice to the charism of Oscar Romero if we go along with these ideological distortions. Romero did not start with political presuppositions, but subordinated politics to the truth of the Catholic faith. His starting point was revelation and salvation history. Christ's message compelled him to confront the abuse of power in his country, where the dignity of mankind—for whom Jesus shed his blood—was stomped upon and trampled.

Of this there is no doubt: Oscar Romero is a true martyr for Christ. He proclaimed God's love and was prepared, like any good shepherd, to give his life for his sheep. Because Romero died for the faith all Christians share, we must put

aside all polarization and quarrelling over his canonization. Christians do not serve the Church by fighting against one another, but by imitating Romero in struggling and suffering for Christ's kingdom.

During the beatification process, the question arose of whether a man who had been murdered for political motives could be canonized. I recall the debates in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as to whether or not the *nihil obstat* should be granted. When I became head of the congregation in 2012, Romero's canonization had been stalled over these questions for some time. In the end, I was able to persuade Popes Benedict XVI and Francis to advance his cause by asking a single question: "Whose motivation are we talking about?" In martyrdom, the motivation of the perpetrator is never decisive. Even if those who murdered Romero believed they were doing so not out of *odium fidei* but for political reasons, this would be irrelevant. What matters is Romero's own intention. One can see this by looking at the death of Christ, the prototype of every martyrdom. The motives of the

executioners were not what gave Christ's death on the cross its redeeming dimension. If that were the case, then the soldiers who crucified him would be the priests of the sacrifice. That is impossible. Jesus Christ is the High Priest of the New Covenant, who offered himself as the sacrifice through which we are redeemed once and for all. In an analogous sense, a Christian becomes a martyr by uniting himself to Christ through his willingness to suffer and die for the faith.

We must not confuse the Church's proclamation with politics. But in El Salvador (and in many other countries), priests and bishops who stood up for justice, opposing right-leaning and left-leaning dictatorships, were wrongly accused of promoting Marxism and communism—or, on the other hand, of being capitalist pawns. A view prevailed that the Church should restrict herself to the improvement of personal character and the individual increase of piety. During the Cold War, many held that if the Church was not willing to take sides in the battle between capitalism and communism, then it should retire from

the public sphere and get on with the practice of religion as a private matter.

To do so would have been to deny the gospel. The kingdom of God begins in this world. The internal and the external, the present and the future, the material goods that maintain our lives and the spiritual goods that enable us to live with God, cannot be separated from one another. This is what Oscar Romero preached—in completely orthodox terms.

*Gaudium et Spes* is the Magna Carta for the Church in the modern world. Its core message is this: Improving society and proclaiming the gospel of Christ should not be seen as separate. They form the one, indivisible mission of the Church. In a way that was authentically Catholic, Oscar Romero proclaimed this truth. Faith is necessary for salvation; yet we are judged on the basis of our works of corporal and spiritual mercy (Matt. 25). In this sense, the authentic liberation theology that Oscar Romero lived and practiced was an expression of the deep catholicity of his heart and mind.

Some bishops denounced Romero to Rome—unjustly—on the grounds that he was politicizing the gospel. Just like his country’s power-obsessed oligarchy, these men accused him of being active in communist subversion. These charges take no account of Oscar Romero’s intention and achievement. He was not interested in toppling social structures so that the proletariat could erect a dictatorship, only to replace one injustice with another. Once and for all, on the Cross, Jesus achieved redemption and liberation for all mankind. This makes all men brothers and sisters in the one family of God. As Romero saw, the problem consists not in the inequality of human abilities and interests, nor even (necessarily) in different degrees of wealth, but rather in violations of dignity and denial of physical and spiritual sustenance to millions of people.

Communism seduced people with the image of a utopia in which exploitation would be abolished. Catholicism rejects this fantasy, and so did Romero. Yet in fundamentally rejecting the atheism of Marxist philosophy, Catholics do not say

that non-Christian philosophies and sciences embody no truth whatsoever. As St. Thomas teaches, “in every truth that is acknowledged as such and in every good that is performed, God is implicitly known as their origin and source.” Not only are Catholics permitted to work together with non-Christian scholars and all men of good will, but they are actually urged to do so. Romero took this approach, neither adopting the atheism of Marx nor rejecting the notion of political and economic liberation out of hand. He grounded all liberation and redemption in God, believing that “the Church does not want to liberate poor people so that they can *have* more, but rather wants them to *be* more.”

After the violent death of his friend, Father Rutilio Grande, S.J., Oscar Romero committed himself to the poor and oppressed. He decided to devote his life to (and even sacrifice it for) the struggle for the new and greater justice of the kingdom of Christ. Doubtless he knew *A Theology of Liberation*, the ground-breaking work of Gustavo Gutierrez that began as a series of



lectures to priests in Chimbote, Peru, in 1968. Like Romero, Gutierrez never tried to change theology into an internal, purely worldly doctrine of salvation. But faced with poor, oppressed people stripped of their dignity, he asked how it was possible, given their sufferings, to speak of God's love. How can we proclaim God's salvation in such a way that "the face of the earth may be renewed"? This struggle for the kingdom of God, relying on the grace and charity that belong to it, has nothing to do with Marxist "class struggle." As Romero said, "We have never preached violence, except the violence of the love that led Christ to be nailed to a cross. We preach only the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome selfishness and to eliminate the cruel inequalities among us." Preaching this simple Christian message brought Romero to martyrdom. Blessed Oscar Romero surely can say: "I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith."

At the end of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gustavo Gutierrez warns against the "intellectual self-satisfaction" of those who are always looking for "new

interpretations" in theology merely for the excitement of novelty:

No political theology, no theology of hope, revolution and liberation, carries as much weight as one genuine initiative in solidarity with society's exploited classes. No theology of this kind can match a single, serious act of faith, charity and hope when such an act knows—in whatever way—that it is obliged to commit itself to active collaboration in a work that liberates man from all that dehumanizes him and prevents him from living according to the Father's will.

In those few words, Gutierrez expressed the profound truth about Oscar Romero, martyr and saint.

*'The Scandal of Redemption' is available from the Romero Trust at £5 per copy including postage and packing. This review was first published in the US magazine 'First Things' in May 2018.*

**ARCHBISHOP ROMERO'S HOMILIES  
A THEOLOGICAL AND PASTORAL  
ANALYSIS  
BY  
THOMAS GREENAN**

*Clare Dixon suggests a good read.*

Tommy Greenan is a priest of the Diocese of St Andrews and Edinburgh. He persuaded his Archbishop, Keith O'Brien to allow him to work on loan to the Church in El Salvador at the height of the civil war which raged in the country throughout the 1980's. He became fascinated by the words and practice of Archbishop Romero and his Master's thesis on Romero's homilies was published in El Salvador some years later. I was present when the book was launched in the parish of Christ the King in the impoverished community of El Limón, Soyapango and I am delighted that Tommy's book is now available in English. In 2010 Tommy was our Romero Lecturer. The following is the prologue to Tommy's book.

**Like a beggar in a gold mine**

Seated on a park bench in Madrid I spent many hours studying the six volumes of homilies preached by Archbishop Romero. This collection of sermons is his testimony of prophecy, sealed with his own blood. He was murdered on account of these spoken words, proclaimed in the name of the God of Life, in defence of the vulnerable, and, naturally, in denunciation of the killers.

For those reasons, the words of Archbishop Romero acquire a meaning of deeply- rooted humanity and deep religious feeling which separates them sharply from the majority of abstract and disincarnate words spoken from church pulpits by ethereal preachers. I took these six volumes with me in my suitcase on leaving El Salvador, in April 1994, after having spent seven years and seven months being evangelised by the Salvadoran people in a rural parish in the department of Chalatenango. In a way, the words of Archbishop Romero are an eternal symbol of the unbreakable spirit of the poor.

**RISE THEATRE ROMERO DVD  
AVAILABLE SOON**



*The stage set for "Romero - Heartbeat of El Salvador"*

A professionally filmed performance of RISE Theatre's original theatre production, 'Romero - Heartbeat of El Salvador' will be available to purchase on DVD from August 2018. DVDs will cost £15 + standard UK postage and will be available to purchase from [\*\*www.risetheatre.co.uk\*\*](http://www.risetheatre.co.uk)

The play was written by RISE Theatre's Artistic Director, Charley Pinfold, in 2017 in association with the Archbishop Romero Trust to mark the centenary of

Blessed Oscar Romero's birth. The production gives a moving and truthful presentation of his life and martyrdom. It explores what our Christian faith looks like in practice and asks challenging questions about the need for Christians to speak out against injustice, persecution and reach out to the vulnerable and marginalised people in our communities. As the finale to the play explains: "Love is unselfish, it cannot walk on by whilst other people suffer, it cannot help but reach out. Love is a heartbeat, and it can never be silenced."

Performed by 3 actors playing over 40 characters, this fast-paced production has been performed over 80 times in churches, schools and at events in the UK over the past year. The production uses an original soundtrack from James Joshua Otto and a colourful and striking graffiti set by Gage Graphics and is performed by John Bosco, Katie Krane and Jake Clifford.

The team are hoping to take it to World Youth Day in Panama next January, as well as offering further performances for schools and churches in 2019.

## RODOLFO

*From the introduction to 'Archbishop Romero's Homilies: a theological and pastoral analysis' by Thomas Greenan*

Rodolfo was quixotic in his appearance, with his sad demeanour reminiscent of Don Quixote. His drooping moustache and well-worn wellington boots summed up his personality to a tee. In a way it was possible to consider Rodolfo as the prototype of the peasant farmer forced to flee into exile on account of the military persecution which swept cruelly through El Salvador in the dawning of the nineteen eighties. Vulnerable, they took to the hills until they found political asylum in neighbouring Honduras.

In August 1988, under the protection of the United Nations and other organisations of humanitarian aid, hundreds of these refugees repopulated, creating new communities, taking possession of land, and rebuilding destroyed houses, in the 'conflict zone'. The 'resurrected' community to which Rodolfo belonged was Teosinte, a hamlet surrounded by mountains

covered in pine trees, to the north of Chalatenango.

One dark night, in the Church of Teosinte, under the flickering light of the Coleman lamp, I remember that, during the homily of a eucharistic celebration, we began to talk about Archbishop Romero. It surprised me to see the normally reticent Rodolfo get to his feet and speak. On that memorable night, Rodolfo gifted us a beautiful homily in nine words filled with emotion, truth, and meaning. He said simply: "On two occasions I shook hands with Archbishop Romero". Life was teaching us how a humiliated peasant farmer felt his dignity returned to him by having shaken the outstretched hand of Archbishop Romero on two occasions.

One day in 1992, at the end of the civil war, Rodolfo, accompanied by his young son, set out to repair his own house, destroyed and abandoned throughout ten years of civil war. (He intended to return to his place of birth). After a birth in the Salvadorean countryside, there exists the custom that the father of the recently born child buries in the mother



earth of his cornfield the placenta and umbilical cord. This gives fertility and good fortune to the family, blessing their work in the fields. During the years of exile on account of the civil war the country folk yearned to return to their umbilical cord and live in justice and peace, enjoying life in the land of their birth. Rodolfo wanted to “return to his umbilical cord” and live in his place of origin, but sadly, it was not to be. Rodolfo climbed on to the roof of his sunken house and without realizing it, he dislodged a live explosive device, concealed among the slates. The bomb killed him instantaneously.

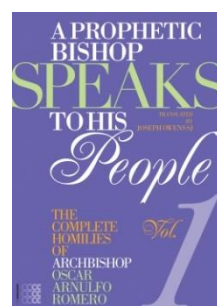
I will always remember Rodolfo, not so much for his resemblance to Don Quixote, but as a poor, anonymous, peasant farmer who shook hands with Archbishop Romero on two occasions. That is to say, Archbishop Romero was a person who gave dignity to Rodolfo and the poor of his country. In this lies his greatness.

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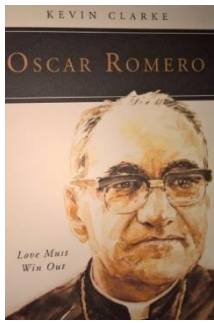
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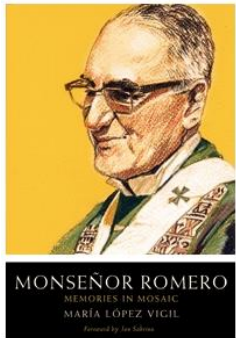


**A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to His People: The Complete Homilies of Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Volumes 1 to 6**

Readers encounter Romero the way ordinary Salvadoreans did—through his sermons, which are brought to a startling new level of clarity and precision. This new set of translations, elegant and mellifluous, is a reference set that no Romero student can do without. All six Volumes are now available from the Trust at **£20 each (incl. p&p)** but we have **An Extraordinary Special Offer for 2018** to individuals and religious communities who are Romero News readers: **all six volumes for £60 (incl. p&p)**. In bookshops the cost would be £34 per volume!

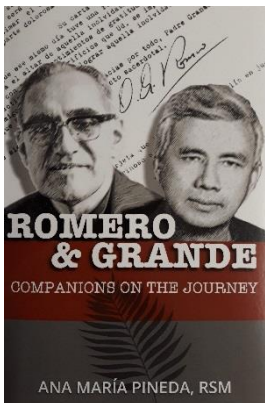


**Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out** by Kevin Clarke. An excellent and very readable short introduction to the life of Archbishop Romero. **£7 (incl. p&p).**



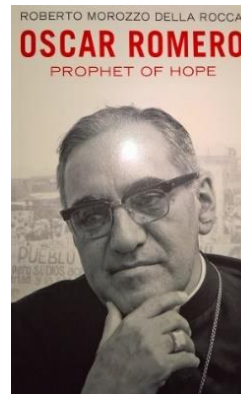
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Romero remembered by the people who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him.

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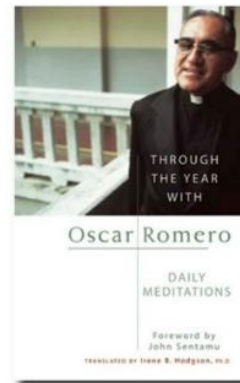
**Romero and Grande – Companions on the Journey** by Ana Maria Pineda. According to Pope Francis one can't understand Romero without Rutilio. This

book, imported from the US, brings together the interconnected stories of the two martyrs in a special and sympathetic manner. **£12 (incl. p&p)**



**Oscar Romero - Prophet of Hope** by Roberto Morozzo della Rocca

This is a comprehensive biography written by one of the authors of the documentation that secured Archbishop Romero's beatification. Well worth reading. **£8 (incl. p&p.)**



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Powerful and moving selections from Blessed Romero's broadcast homilies. **£8 (incl. p&p)**

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