

Romero news

Issue 1: December 2007

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Welcome to Romero News



Julian Flichowski, Chair of the Archbishop Romero Trust, writes...

'To all the Friends of Romero we offer a warm welcome to this our first issue of *Romero News*, the newsletter of the Archbishop Romero Trust (ART).

The Trust was publicly launched in January 2007 to raise awareness about the life and work of Archbishop Romero and to support social justice initiatives in Latin America that carry forward the tradition of his work.

The launch coincided with the publication in English of the book, 'Through the Year with Oscar Romero'. The book was published by Darton, Longman Todd with the support of the Trust.

Already this year, the Trust has organised a number of Romero events, including the commemoration of Romero Day in March, the first Romero Memorial Lecture in May, and a visit to El Salvador for conservation work on Romero's bloodstained vestments and belongings in October.

Included in this issue of *Romero News*, you can read more about these events as well as international news from Rome, San Salvador and Washington.

The Friends of Romero is a network of solidarity to support the Trust and keep abreast of events relating to Romero's life and martyrdom. We are delighted that there are now some 400 Friends supporting the Trust.

We sincerely hope that we can count on the continuing support of all the Friends of Romero for our work in 2008.'

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Romero Memorial Lecture

In May 2007, Monsignor Ricardo Urioste from the Archdiocese of San Salvador visited Britain to give the first Romero Memorial Lecture.

Here are a few extracts from that lecture in which he spoke of his personal memories of Romero.

'We physically bumped into each other'

'The first time we met was purely by chance but it left me

with an unforgettable memory. We physically bumped into each other as he was leaving and I was going into the seminary. Of course I said hello to him and he answered me with a single word - *ayúdeme* (Spanish for "help me") - something that he'd not only said to me but to everyone who met him. I was impressed by his humility, a trait that always distinguished him. Many times he would publicly or privately ask forgiveness for mistakes he had made.'

'His great prayerful spirit'

'I had several opportunities to become aware of his great prayerful spirit, of his soul rooted in God. In December 1979, Cardinal Lorscheider of Brazil together with an important man from the Salvadoran government were visiting him, and I was also present. They were conversing among themselves, and at one point, Archbishop Romero excused himself and left the room. The minutes passed by and he did not return.'



Monsignor Ricardo Urioste with Bishop Michael Evans from the ART Board of Trustees

'It occurred to me that the visitors had not come to see me but to see him, and, after a few minutes, I also excused myself

and went to look for him. I went to his rooms, but he wasn't there: I looked in the visiting room and he wasn't there either. I looked out into the small garden of the hospital and I couldn't find him. I decided to go back to the meeting and it suddenly occurred to me to look in the chapel. And there, inside, was the Archbishop, kneeling in the third pew before the Blessed Sacrament which was exposed there. I approached him and said, "Monsignor, the gentlemen are waiting for you". "Yes, I'll be right there". My understanding is that he had gone to the Lord to consult him about how to respond to the Cardinal and the government representative, and that he never said or did anything without first consulting God.'

'The Church of the street'

'Reflecting on how he listened to people, I remember an occasion when he called all the best minds of the Archdiocese together for a consultation. Among those present were pastoral specialists, ethicists, theologians and canon lawyers. Each one gave his opinion on what he was asked about, and Monsignor Romero paid attention and took notes. After the nearly-two hour meeting was over, he was walking down the steps from the place where the meeting had been held. A person was there, who looked like a beggar, and the Archbishop approached him. I thought he was going to give the man something, but to my surprise, he asked him the very same question that he had posed to the expert people at the meeting. That is how he listened to people, in whom he also saw the Church. This, for him, was the Church of the street.'

A full transcript of this talk is available from our still rudimentary website: www.romerotrust.com

Events to mark Romero Day

24 March, the anniversary of Romero's martyrdom, is celebrated every year as Romero Day.



Pat Jones, speaker at the London Mass

This year, it was marked as usual with memorial liturgies and cultural events in El Salvador and across the globe.

Special masses were organised in Edinburgh, Westminster, Salford and Liverpool under the auspices of the local Justice and Peace Commissions.

An extract from the address given by Pat Jones at the London service is given below:

'Oscar Romero was a priest and bishop whose love for his people who were suffering violence and oppression led him to take their side and to denounce their oppressors. And so he was killed, whilst saying Mass, on this day, 27 years ago. We remember him not just because he was a holy man or a humble priest; not even because he is a saint, even while we wait for the Church to recognise this. It is because he is a **martyr** that his life and death have lasting significance. And his significance is not only within the Church but beyond it, in the public world of politics and power.'

'If they kill me', he said, 'I shall rise again in the Salvadoran people. I am not boasting. I say it with the greatest humility.'

'Remembering Romero re-orientates us to what is happening in our world today, and asks us to pray, to speak, and to act. His life, his love for

his people, his faithfulness and ultimately his martyrdom, together make a story we must treasure and remember, and re-tell from one generation to the next. His is the faith of our Fathers that we will celebrate at the end of this Mass; his martyrdom, a renewal of one of the Church's deepest and most powerful traditions.'

The London address delivered by Pat Jones can be downloaded from our website: www.romerotrust.org

There is also an excellent Romero PowerPoint, produced by Salford Faith and Justice Commission - details available from faithandjustice@salforddiocese.org.uk

Stonyhurst curator travels to El Salvador to advise on care of treasured memories

Sponsored by the Romero Trust, Jan Graffius, the curator at Stonyhurst College in Lancashire, visited El Salvador in October. Jan is an expert on the care of sacred objects and looks after the many Catholic relics and artefacts held at Stonyhurst.

She had the delicate task of examining the vestments worn by Archbishop Romero when he was assassinated in 1980.



Jan Graffius and Sister Maria Julia, examining Romero's vestments in the rooms where he lived

Her purpose was to examine the relics and personal possessions of Romero and of the six Jesuit martyrs of the

University and to advise on their conservation and display. She spoke to us of her experiences:

'I spent many hours working in the three tiny rooms where Archbishop Romero lived in great simplicity. They contain many personal possessions, such as clothing, books, personal papers, photographs and most importantly, the vestments and clothes he was wearing when he was shot.'

'Handling and examining these vestments was an emotional experience and a great responsibility'.

'There were some signs of mould on the cassocks and minor infestations in the display cases. I made condition reports and took photographs of everything, monitored the light levels, UV radiation, humidity and temperature within the rooms and I've now drawn up a report with recommendations for improvement in the care for these important relics.'

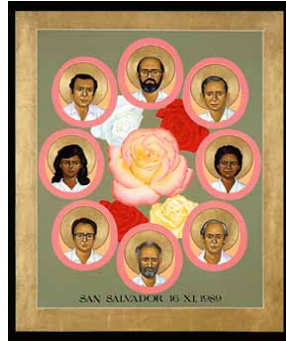
Jan's second project was at the Romero Pastoral Centre at the Jesuit-run University, UCA.

Here the Society of Jesus has put together a display of personal items belonging to Monsignor Romero and to Fr Rutilio Grande, and a large and harrowing collection of clothing worn by the six Jesuits and a mother and daughter dragged from their beds and murdered by an army death squad in November 1989.

'It was impossible not to be moved at the sight of the white shoes worn by 15 year old Celina, when she was shot, along with her mother, the Jesuits' cook, on that fateful night in 1989.'

Jan will make a return visit in 2008 to help set in place simple routines and procedures for the care and conservation of all these martyrdom treasures for the benefit of the thousands of Salvadorans who visit these holy

places - Romero's home, the chapel where he was assassinated and the Romero Centre where the Jesuits were slaughtered. They seek and they find inspiration from the lives and deaths of these great Christian martyrs of the 20th century who witnessed to their faith and gave their lives in the promotion of justice for the poor.



Icon of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, murdered by an army death squad in 1989

In the news

The Cause for Oscar Romero's beatification

15 August 2007 would have been Archbishop Romero's 90th birthday. We hope and pray that, long before his 100th comes along, he will be formally recognised as a Saint of the Church.

Although the beatification process moves slowly in Rome, Pope Benedict's warm allusion to Romero on Sunday 25 March in St Peter's Square boosted our hopes.

Two months later, the Pope's endorsement of Romero's beatification during his flight to the meeting of Latin American Bishops in Brazil gave new impetus to the Cause.

Question: 'Your Holiness, we're arriving in the continent of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Many people are talking about the process for his beatification. Can you tell us where we're at? Is he ready for beatification? How do you see this figure?'

'.... That Romero as a person merits beatification, I have no doubt.' Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI: 'I know that the cause [of Romero] is going forward very well. Bishop Paglia of Terni has produced a very important biography, which clarifies many points... [Romero] was certainly a great witness to the faith. He was a man of great Christian virtue, who was committed to peace and against the dictatorship. He was killed during the moment of consecration; therefore it was a truly incredible death, a testimony to the faith.... That Romero as a person merits beatification, I have no doubt.'



Nevertheless, with little urgency behind these words, we must pray that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith will soon put the Cause back on the fast track to beatification in time for the 30th anniversary of his martyrdom in 2010.

El Salvador Government seeks to honour organiser of Romero's assassination

In February 2007 the Salvadoran Parliament considered making a posthumous award to the organiser of Romero's assassination, Roberto D'Aubuisson.

This incredible attempt at a 'secular canonisation' was thwarted only after a powerful intervention from the Archdiocesan Legal Aid Office, Tutela Legal.

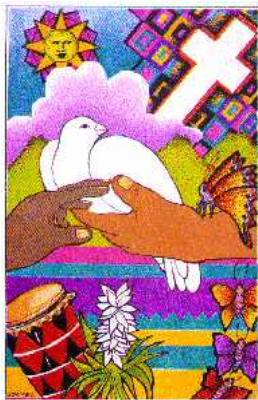
Their protests were part of a national outcry against the glorification of a political assassin.

The Archdiocesan Legal Aid Office continues call for justice

In October 2007, the Archdiocesan Legal Aid Office succeeded in calling a review on the Government's refusal to comply with the Inter American Commission of Human Rights (IACHR).

The IACHR's ruling of April 2000 requires the Government of El Salvador to undertake an impartial judicial investigation into Romero's assassination.

It also calls for the Government to sanction those responsible, to make appropriate economic and moral reparations and to amend the country's blanket amnesty law of 1993.



This year, the Archdiocese has been in discussions with the Government about reparations and the proper, public recognition of Archbishop Romero.

The Government declared, however, that it had been 'negotiating' with the Archbishop about all the demands of the IACHR.

This provoked fierce controversy in the media and in the Church and led to the sudden dismissal by the Archbishop of one of his own lawyers.

On the surface, it seemed that an ill-considered dialogue might be taking place with the Salvadoran Government in the pursuit of 'unity in the national family'.

The fear was that impunity and amnesia might end up as the final victors

Fortunately, the Archdiocese has confirmed emphatically that the talks refer only to the matter of reparations.

Colossal interest from Christians around the world

Through the internet, Christians around the world are following these processes in San Salvador and in Rome with colossal interest.

Romero is so widely seen as a paradigm example of a Church leader who authentically lived that elusive 'Spirit of Vatican II' both in his Episcopal ministry and in his personal life. He courageously and indefatigably defended human dignity and the fundamental rights of the human person, prophetically promoting social justice and, in the end, giving his life for his beloved Salvadoran people.

He is today without doubt one of the most inspiring examples for all of us 21st century Christians struggling to witness to our faith in our work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

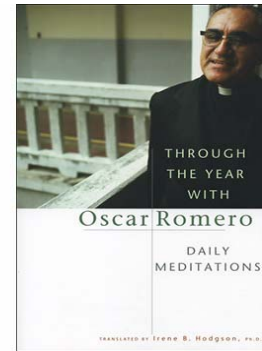
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£7 each
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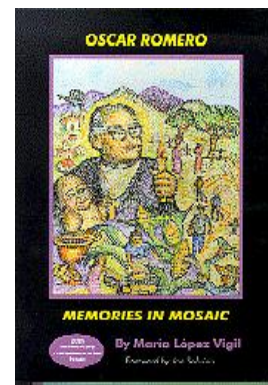
(Saving of £3 on the bookshop price)

Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations



Archbishop Romero was assassinated on 24 March 1980 while celebrating the Eucharist. In these powerful and moving selections from his broadcasts, Romero invites us each day to move into the 'intimate space' of our conscience, to encounter ourselves there, and then to go out to create a more just world. Beautiful and inspiring extracts.

Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic



The story of an archbishop whose courage cost him his life, told through the words of those who worked with him, lived with him and prayed with him. One of the best books on Romero. Un-put-downable. Specially imported from the USA. Highly recommended.

Books may be ordered from the Archbishop Romero Trust, 8 Dean's Mews, London W1G 9EE or by email from romerotrust@btinternet.com