

# Romeronews

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## Jon Sobrino to speak in Britain in June 2008



Jon Sobrino SJ

The Central American Jesuit theologian and spiritual writer, Jon Sobrino, will be in Britain in June for the launch of his new book 'The Eye of the Needle' (DLT, £9.95). During his visit, he will address two public meetings with the title 'Signs of Hope for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', linking the themes of his new book on the option for the poor with the example of the martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero who continues to inspire all those who make a fundamental commitment to social justice and human rights in the midst of a globalising world.

### Edinburgh event

Wednesday 18 June at 7.30 pm at the Lauriston Jesuit Centre, Sacred Heart Church, Edinburgh EH3 9DJ. Tel: 0131 228 6621. Cardinal Keith O'Brien, a frequent visitor to El Salvador over the years, will give the vote of thanks. ALL ARE WELCOME.

### London event

Thursday 19 June at 6.30 pm at Heythrop College, Kensington Square, London W8 5HQ. Tel 020 7795 6600. The meeting is jointly sponsored by Heythrop College and CAFOD. ALL ARE WELCOME.

### Events to mark Romero Day

24 March, the anniversary of Romero's martyrdom, is celebrated every year as Romero Day. This year, it was marked as usual with memorial liturgies and cultural events across the globe, including special masses in Edinburgh and London.

### Romero Mass on Easter Monday 2008 in Edinburgh Homily by Chris Boles SJ

Today is a pretty unique opportunity for us. If I live to be 100 years of age, I'll never again have the opportunity to celebrate Romero's anniversary in Easter time. In fact, I'd have to live to be 198 years old and reach the year 2160 for this to be possible again! And I don't want to do that! By then I'd like to be talking **TO** Romero, up there in heaven, not about him, down here in Edinburgh! I suppose that there are not many once in a lifetime events, so I'm going to make the most of this one.

You might wonder why it is important to have the chance to mark this anniversary in Easter. After all, Easter is about resurrection - we hear today the great Gospel account of the faithful women as they experience the resurrection and meet the Risen Jesus. The gospel describes them as being filled with awe and great joy.

But by remembering Archbishop Romero we are marking the anniversary of a brutal killing, an assassination, something awful, something of great sadness. It appears to be a contradiction. Awe and great joy at the resurrection, shock at the brutality of Romero's death.

In many ways, Lent **IS** a better time to mark this day. He was killed during Lent. And Lent after all, Holy Week in particular, is a time to reflect on the passion and death of Jesus, the seeming overpowering of good by evil. If we were to look for possible scenarios when good might be seen to be overpowered by evil there is none more horrific than the reality in the details of Romero's death. It

was this day, March 24th, 1980, Monday in the 5th week of Lent, and he was celebrating the anniversary mass for the mother of a friend of his, a woman named Doña Sarita. He had read from chapter 12 of the Gospel of John:



Archbishop Romero

*'Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it remains only a single grain, but if it dies it yields much fruit.'*

Following that Gospel he preached a homily about the central place of Eucharist in the life of the faithful. What he said at that time, these last words, are well worth repeating, remembering, pondering and living up to: He said;

*'This holy Mass, this Eucharist, is clearly an act of faith. Our Christian faith shows us that in this moment grains of wheat are changed into the body of the Lord who offers himself for the redemption of the world. In the chalice the wine is transformed into the blood that is the price of salvation. May this body broken and this blood shed for human beings encourage us to give our body and blood up to suffering and pain, as Christ did - not for self, but to bring justice and peace to our people. Let us be intimately united then in faith and hope.'*

At that moment he was shot in the heart with a single bullet, and fell back landing at the foot of the crucifix that stood behind the altar. In fact it was a particularly graphic crucifix, with a huge figure of a bloody and bruised Christ. And Romero lay at his feet. He died within minutes, while his assassin escaped in the confusion. We might say it's a Holy Week scene. But just like Holy Week, it's not the end of the story.

This is why I am delighted to take the chance to uniquely mark an Easter anniversary. In the Triduum of the past three days we recalled with beautiful and powerful liturgy the events of the passion. Good Friday was particularly powerful and poignant, with the reading of the Passion and the veneration of the cross. But it was not the high point. The brutal killing of Jesus would by now have been long forgotten without the resurrection. The high point for us therefore has to be the Easter Vigil

on Saturday night, where we welcomed the risen Christ among us.

And on this Easter Monday we continue this welcoming. So too on this anniversary, and on the 27 anniversaries that have preceded this one, we welcome also the risen Romero. Is this a blasphemy? I hope not. Rather, it's the fulfilment of a prophecy, one made by Romero himself. Two weeks before he was shot he spoke to a Mexican journalist who asked him if he was afraid of death. What he said in reply is the reason I delight in celebrating this mass on Easter Monday:

*'I have often been threatened with death. I have to say, as a Christian, that I don't believe in death without resurrection: if they kill me, I will rise again in the Salvadoran people. If the threats are carried out, even now, I offer my blood to God for the redemption and resurrection of El Salvador. Martyrdom is a grace of God I don't think I deserve. But if God accepts the sacrifice of my life, may my blood be the seed of liberty and the sign that hope will soon become reality. You may say, if they succeed in killing me, that I pardon and bless those who do it. Would, indeed, that they might be convinced that they will waste their time. A bishop will die, but God's church, which is the people, will never perish.'*

What is the evidence of the Resurrection? The gospel of today is a good example: it's the eye witnesses. Those people who met the risen Lord, and who did not doubt what they experienced. "the women came quickly away from the tomb and ran to tell the disciples"! Their experience of Christ was overwhelming, profound, unshakeable. So profound was their experience that on the strength of it hundreds of millions of us believe today. And in turn, we have had our own experience of the risen Lord, our own experience of Christ alive in some or other way, real and tangible. We might then ask what is the evidence of Romero's resurrection? Once again, 'witness' is the key. We just heard Romero say it himself: "If they kill me I will rise again in the Salvadoran people." This is what one poor farmer said of him:

*'He made me feel like a person. Because he loved people like me, and he didn't act like we made him sick. He talked to us, he touched us, he asked us questions. He had confidence in us. You could see it in his eyes that he cared about me.'*

And not only the Salvadoran people but people all over the world. This is what Pope Benedict said of him:

*'I have no doubt he will be beatified... He was certainly a great witness for the faith, a man of great Christian virtue who was committed to peace and against dictatorship.'*

We may wonder these many years later why he was killed in the first place. Last year we had the honour of welcoming his friend and Vicar General, Monsignor Ricardo Urioste here to Lauriston. He is very clear in answer to this.

*'Archbishop Romero was killed because of what he preached and what he said. But he never said anything that was not consistent with the gospel and with the teachings of the church. If these have been given to us, it is clearly so that they be carried out.'*

So there it is, he was killed for living the gospel and proclaiming the teaching of the church, with all it says about human dignity. Many disciples, from Peter and Andrew, through the early martyrs, up to Romero and even beyond, have died for this same simple action of living the gospel. At the very least, then, we have a duty to do the same, so their deaths cannot be said to be meaningless.

Let's leave the final words to Romero himself, speaking in his weekly Sunday homily only three weeks before his death:

*'Don't think, brothers, that our dead have left us. Their heaven, their eternal recompense, makes them more perfect in love. They are still loving the same causes that they died for. That means that in El Salvador this liberating force not only counts those who remain living, but also counts those who they wanted to kill who are more present than before in the people.'*

On this Easter Day we know without doubt that Jesus has not left us, and we know that Romero has not left us. We give thanks for our Easter faith which calls us to be witnesses and disciples. And we give thanks for the Easter faith of Archbishop Romero, which truly did see him rise in the people, not only the people of El Salvador but people all over the world.

**Romero Anniversary Service  
St. Martin-in-the-Fields, London, Easter Saturday  
Homily by Tony Lester, O.Carm.**

At the outset I would like to draw attention to the fact that there are three of us priests here today: Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic. This is perhaps a sign that in a Church which is still sadly divided we can find unity and meaning in the witness of the martyrs.

It is a great honour to be here today in this beautiful church which is so close to the centre of our national life and which, in its ministry and outreach to the poor and marginalised, would be so close to the heart of Archbishop Oscar Romero the anniversary of whose death we keep today.

The memory of Romero the martyr is well established in the hearts and minds of the Christian people, not just in El Salvador but throughout the world. You have only to do a search on Facebook and other "social networking sites" to find that his memory and voice are not a matter of the past, a fading memory in a now aging generation, but rather a living voice which continues to inspire, challenge and energise others, especially our young people, to action and commitment.

Romero the martyr is familiar to us - I would like to reflect with you for a moment on Romero the prophet.



Tony Lester, O.Carm.

The prophets of the Old Testament had a burning concern for the name of God and the right worship of the One who is God. They understood the vital importance this has for the life of the people - not in any sense of liturgical purity but because the worship of the true God is literally a matter of life and death. The concern of the prophet is not for the individual "one to one encounter" of "my faith is a personal private thing", rather the prophet challenges the faith of the nation. Perhaps for Romero a greater part of the challenge he faced was that he was a Roman Catholic archbishop in a country where Roman Catholicism was and is a part of the very fabric of society. What comes to us from the worship of the true God is the truth about the human family that we are all brothers and sisters.

Worship of God which is not open to this truth is idolatry. Worship of God that colludes with and supports powers and structures which dehumanise or which rob humanity of its dignity has nothing to do with the God of Jesus Christ - it has become an abomination.

Romero's voice on behalf of the poor and those committed lay people, religious and priests who were working alongside the poor was not some form of social activism but was a voice of God and on behalf of God.

Religion is a very complex and ambiguous reality. Romero found, as we have heard in the reading from the poem by Bishop Casaldáliga, that he was

abandoned by his own brothers who shared his ministry as bishop. Yet, like all the prophets of the true and living God Romero could not remain silent because he had met the God of Jesus Christ and with his eyes knew that it was Christ who suffered and died in the people of El Salvador.

Romero knew with absolute clarity that he was most likely to share their fate: as did the martyred members of the Melanesian brotherhood and as did Archbishop Faraj of Mosul (Iraq) only a few days ago as a consequence of a war dreamed "in the name of God" by a religious Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and President of the USA.

The use and abuse of the name of God for political ends is perhaps one of the greatest sins of our age. Romero's voice and ministry shed the light of the Gospel on the situation in El Salvador in a particular moment in history.



Mural of Romero amidst a suffering people

Whilst the Gospel is the same everywhere he believed that the preaching of the Gospel has to be specific. It is the concrete circumstances of a time and culture which must inform and direct the preaching of the Good News.

We celebrate this day in the light of Easter, and the light of the Easter candle shines on the images of our martyrs as does the light of the Risen Christ shine on their faces in God's Realm.

In our Gospel reading (Luke 24: 35-38) Jesus shows his wounds to his disciples and invites them to touch him. He gives us that same invitation to reach out, find him, touch him in those most in need; to take a stand with the poor, the handicapped, those excluded from society and those excluded from our Christian churches. Then from that stand point, from a position on the margins to read the Gospel. In this way the poor might teach us to read the Gospel as they taught Oscar Romero, so that we in our day, culture and time, in this concrete moment of history might be faithful to the true and living God of Jesus Christ. Amen.

The homilies of Chris Boles SJ and Tony Lester, O.Carm, can be downloaded from our website: [www.romerotrust.com](http://www.romerotrust.com).

## Pope Benedict XVI affirms Archbishop Romero's pastoral legacy

Vatican City, 28 February 2008: extract from *Zenit* following a visit of prelates from the episcopal conference of El Salvador, <http://www.zenit.org>

*The Holy Father highlighted how most Salvadoran people 'are characterised by their living faith and deep religious sentiment. The Gospel, taken there by the first missionaries and fervently preached by pastors filled with love of God such as Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, has become deeply rooted in that beautiful land, bringing abundant fruits of Christian life and sanctity'.*

## The Continuing Presence of Archbishop Romero by Rodolfo Cardenal SJ

Pope Benedict XVI, speaking of the foundations of the Salvadoran Church to the country's episcopal conference at the end of their ad limina visit to Rome last month, praised Archbishop Romero as a "pastor filled with love of God", committed to the preaching of the Word of God (Allocution of 28 February 2008).

Here, Benedict XVI not only pays homage to the martyr bishop of El Salvador and recognises him as an exemplary pastor worthy of imitation in the preaching of the gospel and the edification of the Church - he also joins the immense majority of the Salvadoran people in their feeling for Oscar Romero, remembering him and commemorating him with genuine admiration and love.

To judge from these words of Benedict XVI, it would seem that the reservations or suspicions there may have been about his episcopal ministry, his dedication to the mission of the Church and his devotion to the will of God, have at last been put to rest.

The importance of Monseñor Romero in today's El Salvador is indisputable. The almost three decades since his martyrdom have not in any way diminished his image, but rather underlined his living presence. Archbishop Romero is a key reference point of national and ecclesial life, even for those who reject him, since they cannot but recognise his importance for the country and the world.

In a society disfigured by violence, massive emigration, inequality and poverty, and the social and political irresponsibility of its leaders, Oscar Romero is still a hugely significant figure.

Although the historic situation is not what it was thirty years ago, when he began his ministry as archbishop, his message has not lost its relevance. At that time, the country was entering a time of bloody and cruel civil war. Now social violence

leaves more wounded and dead than the incipient conflict did then.

Today it is a generalised violence, and the protagonists are not only the gangs of youths organized for crime and drug trafficking, but also regional and international criminal organisations, the drug traffickers and the people traffickers, and ordinary men and women from so-called 'civil society' who cannot resolve their differences without resorting to violence and are also responsible for this violence.

Therefore, in spite of the 1992 peace accords which brought an end to the civil war, whose birth and whose consequences Monseñor Romero clearly foresaw, Salvadoran society continues to be at war with itself. It yearns for reconciliation and a lasting peace, but does not know how to achieve them. It only knows military, social, domestic and gender violence. Archbishop Romero points out some roads to reconciliation and social and personal peace, but there is no one to lead the way down these roads.

Social inequality and poverty have obliged one third of El Salvador's population to emigrate to the countries to the north - principally the United States. The break-up of families, the distance separating those who stayed from those who left, is another disfigurement with serious consequences.

A decision to leave the family and the country is not an easy one. The journey is very risky and expensive. Insertion into the country of destination is not easy. Life and work conditions are hard. The persecution of emigrants feeds fear and despair.

Deportation is ignominious. Loneliness and homesickness take a hold on those who left as adults. The thousands of millions of dollars which they send to help their families is also big business for the financial and commercial sector, the very ones who by reason of their avarice force people to emigrate even today.

In the anguish and suffering that these wounds provoke, Archbishop Romero stands out as an understanding and compassionate pastor, near at hand and therefore a protecting presence for those sunk in uncertainty on seeing their loved ones depart, perhaps for ever, and for those who leave for strange lands, full of dreams and uncertainties.

The government and the wealthy elites make strenuous efforts to project a successful image of El Salvador. They have turned the country into a 'brand' destined for the consumers of international tourism. El Salvador is presented, even by respected international organizations, as a model society. But the social violence, the massive emigration and the scandalous inequality in the

distribution of income cast serious doubts on this 'brand'.

In El Salvador today there is still massive poverty, concentrated in some rural areas. But even more than the poverty, the inequality caused by the unfair distribution of income corrodes the basic social structures. The usual poor are now joined by other sectors of society who are denied opportunities for stable employment, education, health, homes, etc.



Extreme poverty in rural areas of El Salvador

The fight for survival is so fierce that society, families and persons become dehumanised. The ferocious competition for the few available opportunities leaves to one side even the elementary principles of common living such as respect for the human person, for community life and solidarity.

Salvadoran society today is very inhuman and even cruel. The repeated calls of Archbishop Romero to work for the justice of the kingdom of God and for the construction of human fraternity ring out especially strongly today.

His valiant and visionary word is still able to denounce sin, call to conversion and arouse hope where frustration and disillusion predominate.

In the commemorations of Monseñor Romero, the power he has to draw young people together is amazing. The archbishop's own generation is grown up now and is disappearing bit by bit. However, the tradition begun by his ministry has now been passed on to a new generation, which has also found in him a human and gentle pastor, committed to the transformation of unjust and violent structures.

Paradoxically, Oscar Romero has something important to say to today's youth, immersed as they are in a secular and technological culture. The example of his life and message reaches the inmost hearts of thousands of young people. They may not be very clear about its theological and pastoral significance, but there is no doubt that it opens up

for them horizons of idealism and utopia, which the world they are immersed in cannot offer them.



Salvadoran procession commemorating the death of Romero and other martyrs

The Salvadoran Church cherishes and cultivates the tradition of Archbishop Romero, and, with him, the tradition of martyrdom among priests, men and women religious and pastoral workers.

Perhaps this tradition is the most valuable contribution of the Salvadoran Church to the universal Church and to the world. It witnesses to generosity and absolute trust in God.

Christian base communities all over the country, with different ways of thinking and feeling, identify with Monseñor Romero and the Salvadoran martyrs. Their commemorations are calls to live the Christian faith to the end. The consecrated life, in general terms, feels challenged by the martyrs. The hierarchy, the clergy and pastoral workers find today in Oscar Romero, according to Benedict XVI, a model of how to exercise the episcopal, priestly and missionary ministry at the service of a people hungry for the Word of God, profoundly believing, showing incredible solidarity in extreme situations, and in need of having their hope strengthened.

The continuing relevance of the ministry of Archbishop Romero remains utterly intriguing. How is it that after thirty years his words are listened to with admiration and respect, his story is still heard with enormous interest, and that all this has been gathered up by tradition and national art?

The answer is simple, but nonetheless profound. Monseñor Romero's strength is rooted in his fidelity to the reality of the people entrusted to his care and guidance. He did not succumb before the military, political and economic pressures to make him withdraw from what he believed to be the will of God for him. Nor did he give way to certain ecclesial pressures. He kept firm in solitude and abandonment. Not even the threats against his life were able to deflect him from his path. He made his own the suffering of the impoverished, persecuted and abandoned. He did not refuse dialogue with anyone, even with those who attacked him and insulted him. He gave them all a proof of his faith and of his love. He spoke to them all of the God of

Jesus, who condemns injustice and violence, but who also offers unconditional pardon and mercy.

Oscar Romero does not fade away with the passing of the years, because he was faithful to the mission of preaching the reign of God to a Salvadoran people destroyed by secular injustice and cruel violence, but also a believing people, a people in search of a utopia which would give them reasons for hope.

The searing relevance of Archbishop Romero then is that of the God of Jesus, who continues to seek out a humanity unhinged by avarice and violence; but a humanity which in the end, perhaps unknowingly, also yearns for pardon and compassion.

Rodolfo Cardenal SJ is Vice-Rector of the Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA) in San Salvador. This article was published on 20 March 2008 in [www.thinkingfaith.org](http://www.thinkingfaith.org)

**Extract from *Memories in Mosaic*, by María López Vigil, a collection of stories, memories and anecdotes about Archbishop Romero.**

'Every week more people came to the 8:00 am Mass at the Cathedral. Even the plaza outside filled up with people, so they put loudspeakers there too. And they weren't the only people who heard the homily! Practically all of El Salvador was listening to it on the radio!'

"The hardest thing is after the Mass', Monseñor told me once. 'I'm exhausted when I finish.'

'It was because he had the habit of greeting everyone at the door of the Cathedral. And there were so many people! Everyone wanted to touch him, hug him, give him flowers or money or some little gift, or shake his hand, give him their babies to hold for a moment, or kiss his ring. It would get to be midday, and there would still be crowds of people pressing in on him in the hot sun.

Sometimes a few of us priests who had concelebrated the Mass with him would go to the door with him to help receive the little gifts that the people brought. One day I stayed with him. After a while, I saw a little old woman, who must have been more than 80 years old, making her way through the crowd. She came up to me.

"Padre, with all of these people here, I don't think I'm going to be able to get to Monseñor."

"And what did you want, Ma'am?"

"I've brought him a little gift."

"If you'd like, I could give it to Monseñor for you."

"Well, all right."

The little woman reached into an old paper bag that she had in her apron pocket, and she pulled out... an egg.

"Sure, I'll be glad to give it to him."

"Wait. I have more."

She pulled from the bag.... another egg. "God help me if this woman keeps taking eggs out of her bag," I thought.



Elderly woman in El Salvador standing in front of Romero murals

"No problem. I'll pass these along to him."

"Wait. Wait."

She put her hand in the raggedy little bag one more time and pulled out... a wrinkled one-colón bill. It was worth about 40 cents on the dollar at the time.

"This is also for Monseñor."

"Thank you very much, Ma'am. I'll make sure he gets this."

"Oh I hope so, God willing."

I looked at her more closely. She seemed so poor, so old... I stepped aside to chat with her a little more. It was a way to thank her, since it was going to be impossible to get her to where Monseñor was with so many people...

"Tell me, what is your name?"

"Remedios."

"And where are you from?"

"From Nuevo Edén de San Juan."

From there? Blessed Virgin! It was way out on the border with Honduras! You'd have to go down to Ciudad Barrios and get on the San Miguel highway before you could get into San Salvador... I figured it was more than 100 kilometres.



"But Niña Remedios, the bus ride must have cost you more than what you're bringing for Monseñor..."

"No, because I came to San Salvador on my own two feet."

"You walked?"

"Yes, I walked."

We exchanged a few more words, and she went away happy. I'm sure she returned home on foot as well, with all her 80 years weighing on her.

That Sunday, with a crowd that showed no sign of waning, I couldn't give Monseñor either the colón or the two eggs. In fact, I never did give them to him. They were such insignificant things. But one day I did tell him about the little old woman. And at the very next Mass that he celebrated, he thanked her by name. Way out there by the Torola River, in Nuevo Edén de San Juan, I'm sure that Doña Remedios heard him, and I'm sure both her heart and her feet were happy. Maybe she felt like Simeon, that old man in the Bible, who was ready to rest because he'd seen his dreams come true.

Story told by Antonio Fernández Ibañez SJ

## ALERT TO FRIENDS OF ROMERO

**Membership Contributions for 2008  
are now due.**

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## Book Review

Bishop Michael Evans reviews 'Oscar Romero', a booklet by Fr Ashley Beck and published by the Catholic Truth Society



Bishop Michael Evans

On 25th March 2007, at his noon blessing, Pope Benedict referred to Archbishop Oscar Romero among the many missionary martyrs of recent years:

"These are bishops, priests, men and women religious, and lay people, cut down while fulfilling their mission of evangelisation and human promotion."

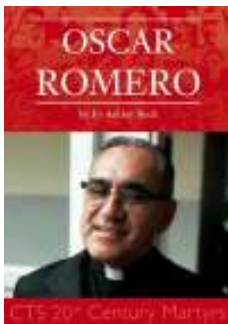
The path to Romero's beatification has already begun, as a 20th century martyr who demanded justice for his people in the name of God.

Fr Ashley Beck has provided a very readable booklet on Oscar Romero, as a contribution to the '20th Century Martyrs' series of the Catholic Truth Society. In 75 pages, for only £1.95, Fr Beck gives a solid introduction to Romero's life, ministry and death, as well as an introduction to his teaching and personal holiness.

This booklet should help inspire those who know little about Romero to move on to more substantive books, especially Romero's own writings such as his homilies, pastoral letters and diaries.

Booklet by Fr Ashley Beck, published by the Catholic Truth Society, CTS 20th Century Martyrs series, 2008, £1.95.

[http://www.cts-online.org.uk/acatalog/info\\_B700.html](http://www.cts-online.org.uk/acatalog/info_B700.html)



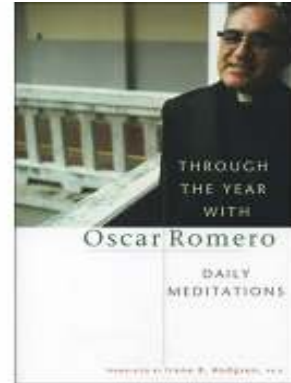
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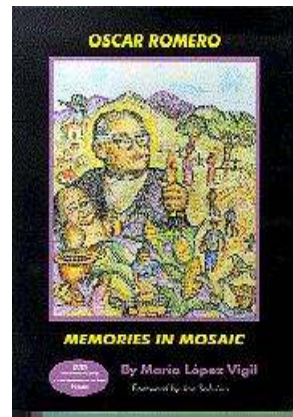
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*Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations*



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](mailto:romerotrust@btinternet.com)**