

Romeronews

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'Romero', the Musical London, Sunday 27 September

A musical based on the life and assassination of Archbishop Romero will have its London premiere at the small Jerwood Vanbrugh Theatre, Malet Street, London WC1 at 2.30pm on Sunday 27 September. The musical, in the style of 'Evita' and 'Chess', was written by George Daly and Liam Bauress and will be performed by 'CLICK', a not-for-profit drama organisation. Tickets are £20 (£15 concessions) and can be purchased from the box office on 020 7908 4800. It is a single performance with theatre capacity less than 200, so book now!



Actors rehearsing for 'Romero', the Musical

The musical was first performed at Worth Abbey School in the 1980s and this London production is timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary year of Romero's martyrdom. It marks the launch of a special website www.RomerotheMusical.com which hosts a complete school drama package with download-able libretto, director's script, vocal score, backing track, guide track, 28-piece pit orchestra parts professionally arranged by Richard Benbow, and supporting material such as Scheme of Work for Year 8 Music and RS/Ethics. You can visit the website now, but it becomes fully operational in October 2009.

Pilgrimage to El Salvador in 2010



Pilgrimage to holy sites of El Salvador

There has been a huge level of interest in the idea of a 30th anniversary pilgrimage to El Salvador in 2010. A group of 20 to 25 would be the maximum possible for a journey of 9 to 10 days. Sadly, the journey will only be possible after March, given that the people we might call upon for guidance will be fully occupied with a huge influx of visitors for the activities around the anniversary on 24 March. Nevertheless we are exploring the feasibility of a pilgrimage towards the end of 2010, to coincide with the 21st anniversary of the killings of the six

Jesuits in November 1989 or the 30th anniversary of the four Maryknoll missionaries, murdered in December 1980. Further details in the next edition of *Romero News*.

Romero Crosses receive Blessing from El Salvador's Customs and Excise

Clare Dixon dispatches thousands of Romero crosses to the UK in time for the 30th anniversary in March 2010.

The Customs inspector looked dubiously at the documents I offered him in the cargo hall of San Salvador airport. "So, what have we got here?" he asked with the world-weary expression of someone who had seen everything twice over. "You say you want to send these boxes to England?" he asked...waving dismissively at eleven, battered, cardboard packing cases.

Two agents from the border police who had already torn open and inspected the contents of the boxes started to tell him that they were full of handicrafts: thousands of beautifully hand-carved and painted wooden crosses..."No drugs?"..."No drugs? ...nothing else?". "Nothing else...only crosses".



Lázaro, who makes the crosses at his workshop in La Palma, a small border town.

"And what do you want with all these crosses in England then?" he asked. "Well, you see," and I hesitated to explain in a country, where the wounds of civil war and

the injustices which caused it, still split the country into two camps: "We want to distribute them through the parishes in England because it's going to be the thirtieth anniversary of Archbishop Romero". "Archbishop Romero?"... long pause. "Oscar Arnulfo Romero?" "err, yes": "Saint Romero of America?" he said..."Yes, that's right". "Well, in that case that's very good, very good indeed!" And with that he signed and stamped all the documents with a flourish. "Have a safe journey, Señora, and thank you."

It seems that these days, people in El Salvador aren't scared any more to talk with pride about Archbishop Romero – their great national hero and staunch defender of the rights and dignity of the poor. But this isn't the only thing to have changed for the better in El Salvador this year.

My short visit to the country coincided with the first month in office of a new president, a new government and a new sense of hope. In June, Mauricio Funes, a popular, respected and fearless TV journalist - a kind of tropical Jon Snow - took office as the first president elected on a platform which promised to bring greater social justice and heal the deep wounds of a divided country. In his victory speech, he pledged a new kind of politics. "To govern well is the best expression of my commitment to our people, inspired by the memory of Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, as my teacher and the spiritual guide of our nation".

The election of Mauricio Funes was as significant for El Salvador as the victory of Barack Obama in the United States. On the morning of polling day, back in March, 49 year old Funes started his day with breakfast and mass in the community of the Poor Clare sisters. Before his 1st June inauguration, his first priority was to visit the tomb of Archbishop Romero in the crypt of San Salvador's cathedral.

Not even the most cynical observer in El Salvador would argue the new President's devotion to the legacy of Archbishop Romero is less than genuinely heartfelt. Whilst he came to power at the head of a political

The 2009 Archbishop Romero Lecture

This year's Archbishop Romero Lecture was delivered by Dean Brackley SJ, a theologian based at the Romero Pastoral Centre, part of the Central American University (UCA) in El Salvador. In this extract from his talk, he describes the importance of international solidarity.



Father Dean Brackley SJ

coalition headed by the former guerrilla movement, the FMLN, Funes is his own man. A glance at his government appointments reveals that his closest and most trusted advisers are no orthodox leftists. His mentor is his former teacher at the St Joseph's Catholic prep school. Many of his ministerial colleagues are, like him, graduates and former staff of the Jesuit-run Central American University. The Minister of Housing was formerly the director of CAFOD's partner organisation, FUNDASAL, and oversaw a transformation in the housing conditions of tens of thousands of the poorest people in the country. He ran one of the country's most respected voluntary organisations, which built and improved more homes for the very poor than any previous government.

But in the midst of world recession and in a country as vulnerable as El Salvador, with almost one third of Salvadorean families dependent on the remittances sent by their relatives working – mainly illegally - in the United States, the challenges for any government are daunting. So far, however, things are looking good. Funes has held out the hand of friendship to the political opposition and built a positive rapport with President Obama. His popularity ratings stand at over 80% in the opinion polls.

As Father Dean Brackley of the Romero Pastoral Centre commented, "While we cannot eat any of this new, good feeling, it signals the kind of irreversible change in political culture that comes along very rarely and that will pay dividends over the long haul".

The day I left El Salvador, a military coup in neighbouring Honduras toppled the government and sent the elected president Zelaya into exile. That such an event is still possible in Central America sent a sinister message to the people of the region's hard-won democracies. In El Salvador, the Romero factor could be decisive in consolidating the new hopes for social justice and ensure that Salvadorans, who for so long were described as a "crucified people", can look at their beautiful handmade crosses and see resurrection.

Since the UCA is on the route of many visiting groups, it is rare that a week goes by without a delegation from abroad requesting a talk –in English! I always look for a chance to tell them why we think their visit is important. It is important for the communities they visit, but also for the visitors themselves.

First-time visitors arrive apprehensive, asking themselves half-consciously, "What will happen when we arrive at these poor communities where the memories of war crimes remain fresh? Will I have a massive Catholic, (or Methodist, or Jewish) guilt attack? Will I have to sell my car back home to buy medicines for these people, trade in my laptop for a wheelchair?" Fears like these evaporate on contact with the people, and the visitors spend the rest of their visit wondering why these people are smiling, how they keep going and why they insist on sharing what little they have with perfect strangers.

The Salvadorans smile because they feel honoured by the visit. While everything around them says, 'you don't count', 'we don't need you', 'no social services for you', 'better to migrate North' – the visitors from so far away are saying something different: 'you are important', 'you count for us', 'you matter'.

If the visitors have the courage to listen to the stories that no one else will hear – of massacres yesterday, and cruel injustice today – these poor people will break their hearts, the visitors will fall in love and then return home renewed in hope and “ruined” for life. That will be the most important thing to happen on their pilgrimage. What does in fact happen? The visitors see their reflection in the eyes of their poor hosts. With that, the ground begins to shift under their feet; the anonymous poor masses of the world suddenly take on three dimensions. They are moving from the periphery of the visitors’ world and closer to the centre. The world seems to change before the visitors’ eyes – the world they have until now half-consciously divided into important people and unimportant people. Their horizon opens.



Arriving in San Salvador, the capital

For many younger visitors, this is a watershed experience. Their consumer society makes it difficult for them to find their way, to find themselves. Whatever they may know of the Gospel of Matthew, they are bombarded with others: the gospel of conspicuous consumption, the gospel of Wall Street, or maybe now, just Walmart, the gospel of MTV and the sweet life. Engaging with this pluralism is disorienting and leads many to question early on whether everything their parents taught them is untrue. What is right, after all? What is wrong? What is true or false? What about God and Church? All this combined with limited life experience makes it hard to find one’s way.

When young visitors enter communities like Jayaque and Tonacatapéque, they forget their problems back home. If they have the courage to listen to those heart-rending stories I mentioned, they will experience a question welling up within them, “If this is how the world is – if this is an average country – then how do I want to live my life?” The wonderful thing about this question is that this is not their parents nagging about when they are going to get it together and settle down. It’s not the priest. No, it’s coming from within them. It’s their deepest voice, frequently accompanied by joy and enthusiasm, which are signs that the Spirit is nudging them to take up their deepest vocation in life.

Let me dwell on that word “vocation” for a minute, since it has no place in the lexicon of our consumer culture. Capitalist society might offer us a job or a profession, but the closest thing to a “vocation” it proposes is getting and spending and just having fun. In our hearts we know that aiming so low degrades us. The temptation is to live in permanent childhood.

Our vocation might be to parent, to teach, to lead a social movement or a combination of such activities. But engaging with the victims of injustice surfaces the deepest vocation we have as human beings: to spend our lives in love and service. Ita Ford, the Maryknoll sister who was raped and murdered with three companions in El Salvador in 1980, wrote to her niece Jennifer a few months before she died: “I hope you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for—maybe even worth dying for—something that energises you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can’t tell you what it might be. That’s for you to find, to choose, to love.” Ita invited Jennifer to discover her deepest calling. Life is short; we only get to do it once. We can sleep through it. Consumer society is designed for dozing. Christians recognise the still, small voice that invites us to find ourselves by losing ourselves as the call of Christ. This, finally, is how God changes the world – by calling people like Abraham and Sarah, Jeremiah and Mary, Peter and Paul, Oscar Romero, Dorothy Day, and you and me.

The victims not only evoke our deepest calling. They put us in touch with the deepest mystery of our lives: the dying and the rising going on in us and around us. They reveal to us that the world is far more cruel than we usually suppose and, at the same time, they help us see that something is underway that is much more marvellous than we usually imagine, a revolution of love and goodness in the teeth of cruelty and contempt. Sin abounds, but grace abounds the more. In places like El Salvador, where we face crosses and resurrections at every turn, the coming of God's reign sometimes seems palpable.

New Salvadoran President pays Homage to Romero

Mauricio Funes, the reformist new president of El Salvador, makes clear his admiration for Romero and the Church's option for the poor.

On 15 March 2009, Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena was elected president of El Salvador, with a five-year term. He was inaugurated on 1 June. As presidential candidate of the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), Funes defeated the National Republican Alliance (ARENA) candidate Rodrigo Ávila by 51.3% to 48.7%.



New President of El Salvador, Mauricio Funes, visits Romero's tomb on day of inauguration

Funes was born on 18 October 1959 in San Salvador, the son of an accountant and a secretary. He attended

Jesuit primary and secondary schools before studying communications at the Jesuit Central American University (UCA). The violent death of his older brother, who was killed by police during a student protest in August 1980, and early responsibilities as the family breadwinner, led Funes to leave university before completing his degree. Despite progressive sympathies, he did not join a political party or participate in the FMLN liberation movement. Instead he taught literature in Catholic schools, where he started to specialise in using audiovisual methods of communication.

An early and lasting influence upon Funes was his teacher at the Externado San José secondary school, Franzi (Hato) Hasbún, who went on to broker the agreement whereby Funes agreed to stand as a presidential candidate for the FMLN and became elected to the Presidency.

In 1986 Funes became a reporter for the state educational channel, launching a highly successful career in television journalism. In 1987 he moved to Channel 12, where he became popular for his analysis and coverage of Salvadorean politics. He interviewed leaders from across the political spectrum, including leaders of the FMLN and other leftist parties. In 1991 Funes assisted Hasbún, then working at the UCA, in developing an audiovisual centre and radio station at the University. He also was a long-time correspondent for CNN TV's Spanish language news service.

Funes' investigative reporting on Channel 12 won him several awards, including the prestigious Maria Moors Cabot Prize in 1994 for promoting press freedom and inter-American understanding. He was promoted to news director at Channel 12 in 1997, but his harsh criticism of the ARENA government led to censorship and death threats, and in 2005 Channel 12 fired him and several other journalists. Funes continued to appear on other channels, however, and remained a national celebrity. With Hasbún as his adviser and mentor, Funes' popularity led to him becoming the FMLN candidate for the presidency in September 2007, the first FMLN presidential candidate who had not been a guerrilla fighter in the 1980s.

In the long electoral campaign, Funes criticised ARENA for doing little to benefit the Salvadoran people throughout almost two decades in power. He promised social justice, economic reform, improved standards of living, universal health care, and better access to education, housing, and pensions, as well as policies to stem the rising crime and gang violence. Once elected, he took a pragmatic and conciliatory tone toward the opposition. He emphasised that he was not a Marxist, promised that he had no interest in imposing an ideological system of government in El Salvador and pledged not to align the country's closely with any foreign power. In foreign policy, Funes has established good relations with the US Administration under President Obama, but his closest political relationship is with President Luis Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil. Funes has appointed his Brazilian-born wife, Vanda Pignato, as Minister for Social Inclusion. They have one son, Gabriel. In October 2007, Funes' son Alejandro, from an earlier marriage, was attacked and murdered in Paris.



Voting in the historic 2009 elections

Several former professors from the UCA and other leading Catholics have been appointed to Funes' government team. His mentor from his school and University days, Hato Hasbún, has been appointed as Minister for Strategic Affairs, a key new role in the government, and Edín Martínez, the President of the Archbishop Romero Foundation is in the Ministry of Housing.

Unseen Labour of Love

Years after Romero's death, Regina Garcia recalls her encounter with a man cleaning his tomb.

The plaques of gratitude are piling up around the tomb of Monseñor Romero – on the walls and over the tombstone. There are little plaques made of varnished wood, giving thanks for the miraculous healing of eyes, varicose veins, or the soul. There are marble plaques in square or rectangular shapes, and plastic ones in the shape of a heart or a diamond, giving thanks to the archbishop for a child who was found or a mother who was healed. They ask for peace. Above all they ask for peace and for an end to the war. And they name loved ones. There are also little pieces of paper where the thanks are in the form of stories, half-finished novels, letters – even poems and songs. And there are pieces of decorated cardboard, pieces of cloth – embroidered, white or multi-coloured... Everything that has caused pain is here, and everything that has brought back happiness, too. Nothing is lost. It all comes back to the arms of Monseñor.

One morning in rainy season, when the skies were heavy with the day's rain, a man in rags, with a shirt full of holes and hair made curly by dust, was cleaning the tomb carefully with one of his rags. The sun had just come up, but he was active and awake. And even though the rag was dirty with grease and grime, it left the tombstone clean and shiny.

When he was done, he smiled with satisfaction. At that hour in the morning, he hadn't seen anyone, and no-one had seen him. Except for me. I saw him. When he left to go out, I felt I needed to talk to him.

"Why did you do that?"

"Do what?"

"Clean Monseñor tomb?"

"Because he was my father."

"What do you mean?"

"It's like this. I'm just a poor man, you know?"

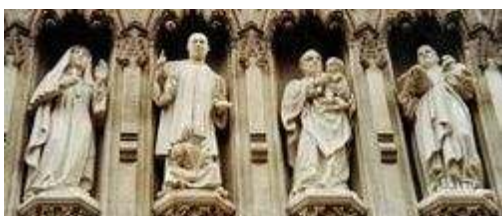
Sometimes I make some money carrying things for

people in the market in a little cart. Other times I beg for alms. And sometimes I spend it all on liquor and end up lying hung over in the streets... But I never get to discouraged. I had a father! I did! 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 in his eyes that he cared about me. Like parents love their children. That's why I clean off his tomb, because that's what children do."

Extract from Memories in Mosaic, by María López Vigil, a collection of stories about Archbishop Romero – available from the Archbishop Romero Trust. See Bargain Offers below.

Liturgies for Romero's 30th Anniversary

Planning is underway for the liturgical celebrations to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Archbishop Romero's martyrdom in March 2010. In York, it looks probable that there will be an ecumenical service in York Minster at lunchtime on Saturday 20 March, which is the weekend preceding the anniversary. In London, it is hoped that there will be an ecumenical service in Westminster Abbey on the Sunday evening following the anniversary, which is Palm Sunday, 28 March.



Romero's statue at Westminster Abbey

So far, we also know there will be services in Edinburgh, Liverpool, Norwich and Wrexham, and it is anticipated that there will be some sort of commemoration in almost every diocese in Britain. Towards the end of the year, the Romero Trust website (www.romerotrust.org) will have a download-able order of service for a liturgy of hymns and readings and also suggestions for a special mass to mark Archbishop Romero's martyrdom. If there is no event in your area, please contact your diocesan Justice and Peace representative or the local CAFOD office in the first instance. Otherwise contact the Romero Trust for advice and assistance.

Archbishop Romero Trust Website

The Archbishop Romero Trust website is currently being redesigned and improved. We hope that, in time for the thirtieth anniversary, it will contain many, if not most, of Archbishop Romero's homilies which number over 190 in all. They are currently being translated by erstwhile volunteers. There will also be extracts from books about Archbishop Romero in English, an extensive photo gallery and links to as many useful Romero-related websites as possible. The result hopefully will be a unique and freely-available, English language resource on Archbishop Romero. We will include a mechanism for donations to the work of the Romero Trust and also copies of the annual reports of the Trust going back to its foundation in 2004.

Annual Subscriptions Warmly Welcome

There are now around 400 *Friends of Romero* in all, who belong to our solidarity network. Unfortunately, only half of our members have sent us a subscription or donation for 2009. If you can afford to do so, please send us a cheque for £10 to help cover our costs or, even better, please sign the bankers' order and gift aid forms which are printed at the end of this newsletter and return them to us at 8 Dean's Mews, London W1G 9EE.

Please consider signing the Gift Aid form attached

Please consider signing the Gift Aid form attached to this newsletter so that we can reclaim the tax paid on your gift.

Free Prayer Cards



The Romero Trust has a supply of Romero prayer cards in English, received from the Canonisation Office of the Archdiocese of San Salvador. If you would like a

quantity for distribution in your parish or elsewhere, we will be happy to mail them to you free of charge.

Book Review

**Frederic and Mary Ann Brusat review
'Dom Hélder Câmara, Essential Writings'
by Francis McDonagh**

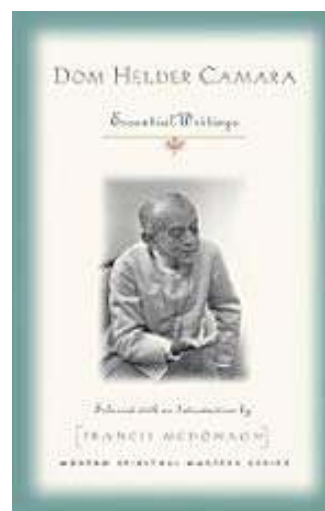
"When I feed the poor they call me a saint. When I ask why so many people are poor they call me a communist." This is one of the most widely quoted statements of Dom Hélder Câmara, (1909 - 1999), an archbishop of Recife, Brazil, who was one of the pioneering figures of the liberation theology movement in the Catholic Church. The material in this volume of the Modern Spiritual Masters Series has been selected and edited by Francis McDonagh, who has spent 20 years following developments and religious issues in Latin America. He has organized the writings of this prolific priest into sections which capture and convey the many themes and interests in his life:

- A Church of Service and Poverty
- From Paternalism to Liberation
- Walking With God
- The Unity of Creation

Dom Hélder Câmara was an active educator, an ardent believer in helping the poor, an advocate of dialogue with other faiths and belief systems, a staunch supporter of human rights, an exemplar of the link between contemplation and activism, a poet (7,000 poems), a defender of the natural world, a devotee of Teilhard de Chardin, a believer in the mighty works of men and women as "co-creators," and a defender of guardian angels. This spirited collection of his writings delivers a multi-faceted portrait of a highly energetic, charismatic, and creative man of God.

Here are some thought-provoking quotations from Camara's writings:

- "We all believe that freedom is a divine gift to be preserved at all costs. Let us liberate, in the highest and most profound sense of the word, all the human beings who live around us."

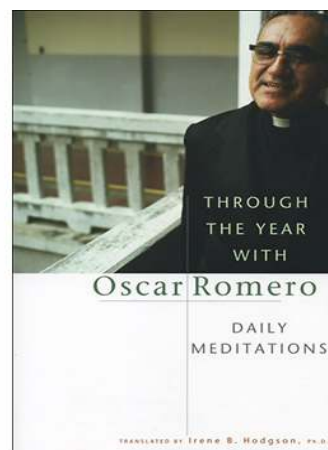


Special ART price of £10.00 including postage & packing

- "Today's world is threatened by the atomic bomb of squalid poverty."
- "Opting for non violence means to believe more strongly in the power of truth, justice and love than in the power of wars, weapons and hatred."
- "Hope without risk is not hope, which is believing in risky loving, trusting others in the dark, the blind leap, letting God take over."
- "I know a priest who likes to shake hands with the trash collectors when they are loading the refuse onto the truck. They try to clean their hands on their clothes. The priest, rightly, says, 'No work stains human hands. What makes hands dirty is stealing, or greed, or the blood of our neighbours!' "

* BARGAIN OFFERS * – Books and Crosses

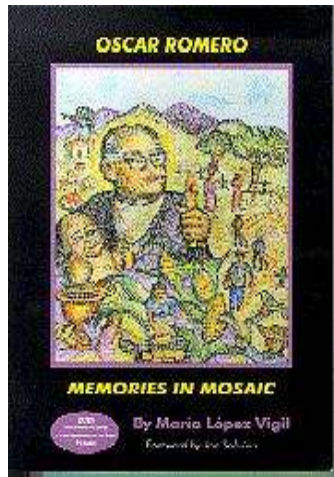
*Through the Year with Oscar Romero:
Daily Meditations*



Special ART price of £9.00 including postage and packing

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.

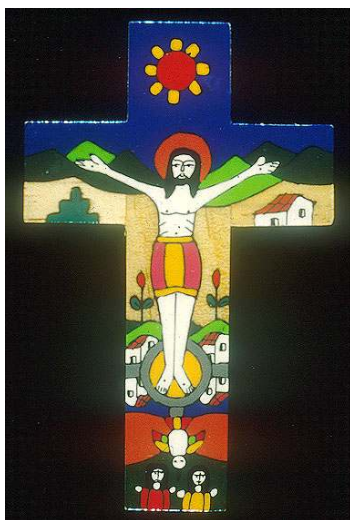
Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic



Special ART price of £9.00 including postage and packing

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.

Wooden, hand painted crosses



Special ART price of £3.00 including postage and packing

Lázaro Rodríguez makes these beautiful hand-painted crosses in his family workshop in the small border town of La Palma. They measure 10 cms long x 6 cms wide.

The Symbolism of the Crosses

The painting on the crosses is very delicate and full of symbolism. The main image is of Christ on the Cross, and the title is 'The New Creation'. This refers to the new creation following the death of Christ. Above Christ is the sun that gives light to the world. The dove symbolises the Holy Spirit. The people below represent the disciples, and the animals signify creation and nature. The main message from this image is that God came to free his people from sin.



Lázaro, who makes the crosses, speaks about Romero

Lázaro says, "I admire Romero. I wasn't very old when he was alive, but I remember him and I admire him for his love of God and his courage to defend people who were mistreated or whose children were kidnapped. That's why we in El Salvador celebrate his anniversary. I am very happy that my crosses are going to England and Wales and very grateful to people there. Thanks to you, we are able to earn our living".

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