

Romero Remembrance

In the quiet confidence of our prayer, as we lift our hearts to God, we pause this evening to remember a pastor and martyr: Monseñor Óscar Arnulfo Romero. He was a gentle, steady priest who never expected to become well known. Yet when he saw his people suffering — and when his friend, Fr Rutilio Grande, was murdered — he realised that following Jesus meant speaking for the poor and telling the truth about injustice. As Archbishop of El Salvador, he became a voice for those with no voice, and he stayed faithful to that calling even when it put him in danger. He was assassinated on 24 March 1980, shot while celebrating Mass. This year, 2026, we mark the 46th anniversary of his martyrdom.

Romero's life has shaped the Church in Latin America and far beyond because it points us back to the heart of the Gospel. He insisted that Christ is present in those who suffer — that we meet the Lord among the wounded and the forgotten. In that sense, the victims of violence are a privileged place to listen for the voice of God. In Romero's witness we glimpse again the God who is our Good Shepherd: The One who cares for his people and lays down his life for them; the Shepherd moved with compassion, seeking to ease the pain of those who suffer.

Romero's courage also calls us to integrity — to let what we believe and what we do belong together. We are invited to take up the cross of truth, knowing that truth-telling is not easy when it requires us to name injustice. Living faithfully to the Gospel often places us on difficult ground, where we are invited to be creative, humble, and generous. It means recognising God in the faces of young people who hunger and thirst for justice and recognising in the innocence of children a longing for peace.

Our readings speak into this. In Numbers (21.4-9), the people are healed when they look to the sign lifted up — a reminder that God meets us in our distress and draws our eyes towards his saving mercy. In Luke (14.27-33), Jesus is clear: discipleship has a cost. We do not stumble into it by accident; we “count the cost”, and we take up the cross. Romero counted that cost, and so do all who choose compassion over fear, truth over silence, and love over self-protection.

I speak from Mexico, a country that in recent decades has lived with rising violence, fuelled in part by the so-called “war on drugs”. Violence does not create peace: it multiplies fear, resentment, and division. The Christian way is different. Christ calls us to build communities where dialogue can happen, where forgiveness is possible, and where reconciliation is patiently pursued.

Romero lived in a context not unlike ours today — not only in Mexico, but in many places carrying the pain of conflict, where neighbours are set against one another. Remembering Romero invites one simple, searching question: how will we respond to our sisters and brothers who suffer — those who live with fear, those who go hungry, those without safe shelter, and those with nowhere quiet to rest?

There are many ways to respond. Today I want to share one that has taught me something about God’s strength.

In Mexico, more than a hundred thousand people are missing. In that darkness, hundreds of mothers have decided to go out and search for their sons and daughters. Many are poor; many have no political experience. Yet they have formed groups to support one another. They take to the streets, go to hospitals, visit prisons, speak to journalists, and organise searches. They refuse to be silenced. The love of a mother for her child can move mountains; it can face Goliath if it must.

So we must ask: how do these mothers keep hope alive amid danger and exhaustion? How do they keep going?

One of them is Doña María Herrera. Two of her sons — Raúl and Jesús Salvador — disappeared in 2008. While she was still demanding their return, two more — Gustavo and Luis Armando — were taken in 2010. Now in her seventies, María has spent years speaking out with an unshakeable faith in God.

Some time ago, I accompanied her to a meeting with a bishop and several priests. She spoke of the Good Shepherd — the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one that is lost. Then she asked, very simply, “If you are shepherds, why have you not gone out to look for the sheep who are missing?”

There was silence — heavy and uncomfortable.

Then Mrs Herrera said, “God is the first to go searching. God goes out, not knowing where to begin, but still goes. That’s how we started too.”

Her words have stayed with me. Through mothers like her, God seems to be asking the Church the same question: will you go out? Will you seek the lost? Will you stand where the pain is?

These women have learned to search together: sharing information, teaching one another, accompanying one another. Many speak of themselves as co-workers with the Good Shepherd, looking for his lost sheep. And they do not do it alone. Networks of support have grown around them: human-rights defenders, counsellors, clergy, neighbours, and friends. Each brings what they can — their “five loaves and two fish” — and somehow mercy multiplies.

Over time, something else happens. Many mothers begin to say, “I no longer search only for my child — I search for all of them.” Personal grief becomes shared grief; shared grief becomes solidarity; and solidarity becomes friendship. And without friendship, hope cannot stand. Friendship becomes the cornerstone of hope: a steady, human answer to the question of despair.

In the lives of these women we see something of the mercy of God made flesh: love that refuses to give up, love that keeps walking, love that keeps searching.

So today, as we commemorate Óscar Romero, let us pray for all who are searching — and for all who wait in anguish across the world.

Lord God, give strength and grace to mothers searching for their children: in Mexico, in El Salvador, in Ukraine, in Gaza, in Iran, and wherever families live with the pain of disappearance. Enfold them with your comfort, protect them from harm, and keep hope alive in their hearts.

Lord, in your mercy: *hear our prayer.*

Stir in us the courage of your servant Romero: to speak truth with humility, to practise compassion with courage, and to become peacemakers in the name of Jesus Christ.

Lord, in your mercy: *hear our prayer.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.

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