

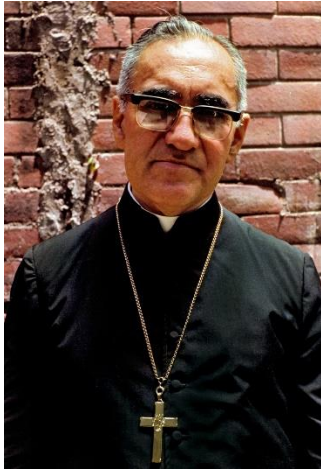
Oscar Romero: Modern-Day Martyr

Compiled by Ethel Howley, SSND

“When we struggle for human rights, for freedom, for dignity, when we feel that it is a ministry of the church to concern itself for those who are hungry, for those who have no schools, for those who are deprived, we are not departing from God’s promise. He comes to free us from sin, and the church knows that sin’s consequences are all such injustices and abuses. The church knows it is saving the world when it undertakes to speak also of such things.”

— Oscar A. Romero, *The Violence of Love*

When Bishop Oscar Romero was appointed archbishop of San Salvador in 1977, he was considered a very “safe” [choice](#). He had served as auxiliary bishop there for four years before his three years as bishop of Santiago de Maria.



Oscar’s father wanted him to be a carpenter—a trade for which he demonstrated some talent. Seminary classes in El Salvador preceded his studies at Rome’s Gregorian University and his ordination in 1942. After earning a doctorate in ascetical theology, he returned home and became a parish priest and later rector of an inter-diocesan seminary.

[Three weeks](#) after his appointment as archbishop, Romero was shaken by the murder of his good friend Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, a vigorous defender of the rights of the poor. Five more priests were assassinated in the Archdiocese of San Salvador during Romero’s years as its shepherd.

When a military junta seized control of the national government in 1979, Archbishop Romero publicly criticized the US government for backing the junta. His weekly radio sermons, broadcast throughout the country, were regarded by many as the most trustworthy source of news available.

Romero’s funeral was celebrated in the plaza outside the cathedral and drew an estimated 250,000 mourners.

His tomb in the cathedral crypt soon drew thousands of visitors each year. On February 3, 2015, Pope Francis authorized a decree recognizing Oscar Romero as a martyr for the faith. His beatification took place in San Salvador on May 23, 2015. He was canonized on October 14, 2018.

Reflection

Oscar Romero and many other Latin American martyrs for the faith were falsely accused of advocating a Marxist-inspired “theology of liberation.” Following Jesus always requires choices. Romero’s fiercest critics conveniently dismissed his choices as politically inspired. An incarnational faith must be expressed publicly.

[Click here for more on Saint Oscar Romero!](#)