



St. Óscar Romero, in full Saint Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez, (born August 15, 1917, Ciudad Barrios, El Salvador—died March 24, 1980, San Salvador; beatified May 23, 2015; canonized October 14, 2018; feast day March 24), Salvadoran Roman Catholic archbishop who was a vocal critic of the violent activities of government armed forces, right-wing groups, and leftist guerrillas involved in El Salvador's civil conflict.

Although Romero had been considered a conservative before his appointment as archbishop in 1977, he denounced the regime of Dictator Gen. Carlos Humberto Romero (no relation). The archbishop also refused to support the right-wing military-civilian junta that replaced the deposed dictator. Further, his outspoken defense of the poor—who were powerless victims of widespread violence—brought repeated threats to his life. In the face of those threats, Romero declared his readiness to sacrifice his life for the “redemption and resurrection” of El Salvador. His unreserved advocacy for human rights made him a hero to many, and he was nominated for the 1979 Nobel Prize for Peace by a number of U.S. congressmen and 118 members of the British Parliament. The following year Romero was assassinated at the hands of an unknown assailant while saying mass. The Comisión de la Verdad para El Salvador (“Truth Commission for El Salvador”), approved by the United Nations, later concluded that Romero's death had been carried out by a right-wing death squad. During his funeral a bomb or bombs went off outside the Metropolitan Cathedral of San Salvador, where tens of thousands of mourners were gathered at what has been considered one of the largest demonstrations in the country's history. Gunfire then rained down on the panic-stricken crowd, leaving an estimated 27 to 40 people dead and more than 200 wounded from the violence and subsequent stampede.

Romero's focus on the church's “preferential option for the poor” principle and his call for an end to their oppression by the regime led some Latin American Catholic theologians who were associated with the liberation theology movement to view him favorably. It is unclear, however, how closely Romero associated with the movement, which integrated Marxist philosophy with Catholic social ethics and emphasized the struggle of the poor for justice. In 2015, 35 years after Romero's death, Pope Francis declared him a martyr. Romero was beatified later that year. In March 2018, following the medically inexplicable cure of a terminally ill Salvadoran woman whose husband had been seeking Romero's intercession, Pope Francis approved the miracle necessary for Romero's canonization, which took place at the Vatican in October 2018. According to canon law, martyrs require only one miracle for sainthood rather than the standard two.

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