

# Archbishop Oscar Romero

Oscar Arnulfo Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador on February 22, 1977. At that time, the country of El Salvador was ruled by a military government that violently repressed the people; widespread social and political tension was growing. Romero became an outspoken voice of the impoverished and persecuted of the country; he became a well-known critic of violence and injustice. On March 24, 1980 Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated as he was celebrating Mass.

*Archbishop Oscar Romero lived and preached in a time of national crisis in El Salvador. In the face of political violence, government repression, and the persecution of his church, he preached a gospel of peace, of love—even of one's enemies, of forgiveness, and of justice. He understood—and never tired of saying—that injustice was at the root of the violence and that the violence of terrorism, repression, vengeance, and armed revolution would not end if that root was not torn out form world.*

Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico

## RESOURCES:

**The Religious Task Force on Central America and Mexico** has developed an educational packet on Oscar Romero that includes an **introduction, biography and liturgy**. This packet, entitled “A Voice for Peace” may be downloaded free of charge from their web site: [http://www.rtfcam.org/resources/packets/romero/2003\\_packet/2003\\_romero\\_packet.htm](http://www.rtfcam.org/resources/packets/romero/2003_packet/2003_romero_packet.htm)

*Prophet to the Americas*, a book about Oscar Romero written by Margaret Swedish is also available site of the Task Force on Central American and Mexico: <http://www.rtfcam.org/resources/books.htm>.

Groups may also want to view the 1989 movie, *Romero*, which recounts the life of Oscar Romero. This film is available in many video stores and on the Internet, for rent or for purchase.

## ACTIVITY:

If you do a prayer service, film viewing, and/or period of study and sharing on Archbishop Oscar Romero, have group members take turns reading aloud the quotes on page 2. Then ask someone to read the final prayer on page 3. Afterwards, take time to answer the discussion questions below.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Identify and discuss one quote of Oscar Romero that speaks to you, challenges you and/or makes you think more deeply.

Who can you share this quote of Oscar Romero with?

How does your church community reflect a commitment to challenge the sinful structures of the world?

What do you think Archbishop Oscar Romero would ask of your faith community?

Why does Archbishop Romero draw a distinction between “playing politics” and working towards God’s reign? Have you seen examples of both in your own experience?

## The Words of Oscar Romero

The church's social teaching tells everyone that the Christian religion does not have a merely horizontal meaning, or a merely spiritualized meaning that overlooks the wretchedness that surrounds it. It is a looking at God, and from God at one's neighbor as a brother or sister, and an awareness that "whatever you did to one of these, you did to me."

March 14, 1977

**What good are beautiful highways and airports, beautiful buildings full of spacious apartments, if they are only put together with the blood of the poor, who are not going to enjoy them?**

July 15, 1979

Those who do not understand transcendence cannot understand us. When we speak of injustice here below and denounce it, they think we are playing politics. It is in the name of God's just reign that we denounce the injustices of the earth.

July 16, 1977

**A religion of Sunday Mass but of unjust weeks does not please the Lord. A religion of much praying but with hypocrisy in the heart is not Christian. A church that sets itself up only to be well off, to have a lot of money and comfort, but that forgets to protest injustices, would not be the true church of our divine Redeemer.**

December 4, 1977

For the church, the many abuses of human life, liberty, and dignity are a heartfelt suffering. The church, entrusted with the earth's glory, believes that in each person is the Creator's image and that everyone who tramples it offends God. As holy defender of God's rights and of his images, the church must cry out. It takes as spittle in its face, as lashes on its back, as the cross in its passion, all that human beings suffer . . . They suffer as God's images.

December 31, 1977

Source: "Seven Sermons of Oscar Romero for Lent"

<http://www.justpeace.org/romero.htm>

**Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.**

January 7, 1978

Many would like the poor to keep on saying that it is God's will for them to live that way. But it is not God's will for some to have everything and others to have nothing. That cannot be of God. God's will is that all his children be happy.

September 10, 1978

**I will not tire of declaring that if we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally.**

September 23, 1979.

The great need today is for Christians who are active and critical, who don't accept situations without analyzing them inwardly and deeply. We no longer want masses of people like those who have been trifled with for so long. We want persons like fruitful fig trees, who can say yes to justice and no to injustice and can make use of the precious gift of life, regardless of the circumstances.

March 9, 1980

**Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ, will live like the grains of wheat that dies. It only apparently dies. If it were not to die, it would remain a solitary grain. The harvest comes because of the grain that dies . . . We know that every effort to improve society, above all when society is so full of injustice and sin, is an effort that God blesses; that God wants; that God demands of us.**

March 24, 1980 - These last words were taken from Oscar Romero's last sermon, just moments before he was shot and killed.

## A Future Not Our Own

It helps, now and then, to step back  
and take the long view.  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of  
the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Nothing we do is complete,  
which is another way of saying  
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the church's mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about:  
We plant seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything  
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.  
We are workers, not master builders,  
ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.  
Amen.

*By Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero*