
We Remember Óscar Romero

**An Evensong meditation by the Very Rev. Sam Candler
The Feast of Óscar Romero**

*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies,
it remains just a single grain;
but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:24).*

We remember today an archbishop, of the recent Roman Catholic tradition, unusual for us in two ways: unusual to be remembering someone so recently deceased and also unusual to be remembering someone not of the Anglican or Episcopal branch of the Jesus Way. The word “catholic,” as most of you know, simply means “universal.” Most of us are catholic Christians. This cathedral, the Cathedral of St. Philip, is a church of the Anglican Catholic tradition, which is the Episcopal Church. We are catholic, fully catholic; but we are not Roman Catholic. And, of course, there are plenty of Anglican Catholics, Episcopalians, worth remembering, and plenty of Roman Catholics worth remembering.

It is the Roman Catholic archbishop, Oscar Romero, a good and holy man, whom we remember today, and whose violent death occurred in my own lifetime; I remember it. It was in the year 1980, when I was still in school. The plight of the poor in El Salvador was steadily in the United States news. We heard regularly of the struggle, the fight, for civil rights in that troubled country.

Apparently, however, Oscar Romero began his ordained life as a rather conservative leader. He was a priest, Monseñor Romero, a social conservative, when he was appointed archbishop in 1977. He followed the general Roman Catholic principle of God’s preferential option for the poor, but he was not noted for what was known specifically as liberation theology.

It was when his friend and fellow priest, Rutilio Grande was murdered, that Oscar Romero became a strong critic of the military government of El Salvador. He became more and more outspoken. Finally, in 1980, at a small hospital chapel, he preached a homily on the same text we have heard this afternoon, “Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24). Then he walked to the altar to celebrate Holy Eucharist. As he stood behind the altar, a car drove up to the door of the church, a man got out of the car, and Romero was shot and killed at the altar itself.

But the word, “finally,” does not really describe the sequence of events. That violent act of murder was not the final word. People from around the world, and not just from El Salvador flocked to remember him in the following weeks. Our own friend and colleague here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, Deacon Juan Sandaval, was among those present and paying respects.

Then, at the time of Romero’s funeral, it is estimated that over 250,000 people were in Sal Salvador, at the Metropolitan Cathedral. While the funeral was occurring, gunfire erupted again, and at least 30 people were killed, either by intentional gunfire and bombs, or by stampede.

“If a grain of wheat dies, it bears much fruit.” Death is not the final word. Romero’s death was a violent event in a violent time, but it did evoke an international outcry against human rights abuses in El Salvador. And his witness, was gradually honored by all sorts of religious traditions. The Roman Catholic church recognized Oscar Romero as a saint in 2018, and The Episcopal Church is humbled to pay our respect, too. A statue of Oscar Romero sits in the Gallery of Twentieth Century Martyrs at Westminster Abbey, in London. Similarly, a

statue of Romero sits on the Human Rights Porch at the Episcopal National Cathedral in Washington, DC.

To remember Oscar Romero today is to remember those who speak out against violence, and to remember those who speak for civil rights, wherever they are. Remembrance can change the world. We remember, today, and may our remembrance lead us towards liberty and justice for all.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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