

# Romeronews

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Archbishop Romero  
Centenary 1917 - 2017  
*Celebrating one hundred years of Blessed Oscar Romero*

The Archbishop  
Romero Trust

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There is lots going on this year! Are you on Twitter? If so, why not follow:

@RomeroTrust to keep up with events?

Alternatively find the Trust on Facebook: search for Archbishop Romero Trust.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### Romero Week

#### The Secret of Romero: Passion for God and Compassion for the Poor

18 to 25 March 2017

**Speaker: Sister Martha Zechmeister C.J.**

18 March: Wrexham Cathedral

12:00 Mass

Celebrant: Bishop Peter Brignall

14:00 Romero Week Talk

20 March: Edinburgh

Lauriston Centre 19:30

21 March: Glasgow

St. Aloysius College 19:00

23 March: Sheffield

St. Marie's Cathedral 19:00

24 March: Canterbury

St. Thomas of Canterbury Church 19:30

25 March: Horsham

St. John the Evangelist Church 16:00

25 March:

National Ecumenical Service for the  
37<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Martyrdom of Blessed Oscar  
Romero

St Martin-in-the-Fields Church, Trafalgar Square,  
London 11:00

## Other Romero Week and Centenary Year Events

### Romero Mass

19 March Liverpool Cathedral 11:00

Celebrant: Archbishop Malcolm McMahon

### Formal Celebration of the Feast of Blessed Oscar Romero

24 March Mass and Reception

St George's Cathedral, Southwark 12:30

Celebrant: Bishop Pat Lynch

### Romero Commemoration Talk and Mass

"Blessed Oscar Romero: A saint for our time"

25 March

Sacred Heart, 25 Queen Street, Colne 13:30

Speaker: Fr. O'Keefe

### Lecture at St. Albans Abbey,

25 May at 20:00

"Celebrating an Inspiring Ecumenical Icon – the  
Life and Legacy of Oscar Romero"

Speaker: Julian Filochowski

### 100<sup>th</sup> Birthday Mass

12 August 12:30

St George's Cathedral, Southwark

Celebrant: Archbishop Peter Smith

Preacher: Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia

### Ecumenical Celebration of the Centenary of Blessed Oscar Romero

23 September Westminster Abbey 15:00

Preacher: Lord Rowan Williams

### Romero Trust Centenary Pilgrimage

13 – 24 November

## CENTENARY AND CANONISATION IN 2017?

*Julian Filochowski has been following the cause of Romero's canonisation for many years, and is excited at the prospect that it may happen very soon.*

August 15, 2017 will be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Blessed Oscar Romero. We hope and pray, and our intuition tells us, that 2017 will also be the year of his canonisation, alongside the beatification of his murdered Jesuit friend, Rutilio Grande.



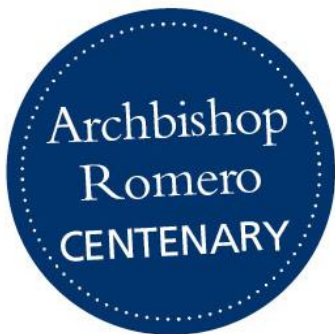
*Julian in front of a mural in El Paisnal of Romero and Rutilio*

To move from beatification to canonisation for Oscar Romero there remains one single hurdle – a verified miracle in accordance with canonical norms. Three inexplicable recoveries of sick Salvadorean men and women, who had recovered from incurable conditions

after seeking the intercession of Archbishop Romero, were taken to Rome and were examined there informally early in 2016 by experts familiar with canonisation processes. Unfortunately, these cases were found wanting. Later in 2016, however, a fourth well-documented cure was submitted and was deemed to be potentially a credible miracle. As required, a diocesan tribunal has now been set up in San Salvador to examine the possible miracle. It is headed by the Chancellor and Vice-Postulator of Romero's Cause, Mgr. Rafael Urrutia. With the assistance of expert witnesses, it will make a judgment and submit this conclusion, backed up by solid evidence, to the Vatican Congregation for the Causes of Saints, hopefully early in 2017. This will then be studied in Rome, in turn, by a 7-person commission of medical experts, a 6-person commission of theologians, and the fourteen Cardinals of the Congregation. If all concur, a new 'Positio' dealing with the miracle will be submitted to Pope Francis for final approval of the canonisation.

This Roman process normally takes 12 to 18 months provided there are no

unexpected difficulties. However, if the canonisation of Romero was an explicit priority for Pope Francis for 2017 then this latter process could be completed in around six months (as was similarly the case with the miracle for John Paul II's canonisation). Therefore, **IF** the evidence for the 4<sup>th</sup> miracle is convincing, and **IF** the San Salvador tribunal completes its work quickly and efficaciously, and **IF** Pope Francis indicates this is a top priority for him, **then** a Romero canonisation could be announced and the ceremony completed during 2017.



If the canonisation were to come to pass, the question is whether it would take place in Rome or in El

Salvador. Normally canonisations take place in Rome since the ceremony is the recognition of a saint of the whole universal Church - and it would be easier to fit into the papal schedule the single day necessary for a ceremony in St Peters. The Church in El Salvador, not surprisingly, is making the most strenuous efforts to persuade Pope Francis to travel to Central America to

canonise Romero - and simultaneously beatify Rutilio Grande (whose cause is moving forward smoothly in Rome). And their target date is August 15<sup>th</sup> – the centenary date. Pope Francis is notoriously unpredictable. His words and actions are frequently focused on the peripheries of our society and of our world. It is not inconceivable that he would judge it highly appropriate to make a journey to this tiny and peripheral Latin American nation in order to raise to the altars an iconic Father of the Latin American Church and to honour there his fellow Jesuit, as Blessed Rutilio Grande. “Quite unthinkable” say the regular Vatican-watchers. But although the Roman Offices close down in August, Pope Francis carries on working, albeit at a less hectic pace. A journey to El Salvador in mid-August seems at first sight unlikely, certainly a most unusual departure, but, we have been told, not impossible.

So there we have it - the August 2017 centenary of Romero's birth, a credible miracle that would make canonisation a matter of 'when' not 'if', a Pope who has expressed more than once his esteem for Oscar Romero and manifestly would

like to see him as Saint Romero, an exceedingly tight but not unprecedented timetable to fulfil all the canonical requirements within this year, and prayers for Romero's early canonisation pouring up to heaven from every corner of the earth. There are so many big 'if's in this equation; but canonisation or its announcement, in Rome or in El Salvador, must surely be on our radar for 2017. On 24 March, Romero's Feast Day, Pope Francis will meet with all the Salvadorean bishops in Rome. This could well be the moment of clarification.

## **PILGRIMAGE 2017 ROMERO'S CENTENARY**

Could there be a better time to visit the land of Blessed Romero's ministry? Details are now available for our pilgrimage in 2017 to celebrate the centenary year of Blessed Oscar Romero's birth. The dates are 13 to 24 November 2017 and the all-inclusive cost approximately £1700, subject to currency exchange rate fluctuations. For further information, please contact Anthony Coles at [arctc@btinternet.com](mailto:arctc@btinternet.com) or by telephone on 020 7431 3414.

*Jutta and Roger Davis went on the first pilgrimage in 2010. Here Jutta tells of the lasting impact the visit made upon their lives.*



*Jutta and Roger by the Romero mural in San Salvador's international airport*

Before my husband Roger and I embarked on the first El Salvador pilgrimage the Romero Trust had organised, we did not quite know what to expect. We went with curiosity, a spirit of openness but also a bit of apprehension (especially Roger, who turned out to be the only Protestant in a group of Catholics!). Roger had pretty much travelled the world by that stage, but it had largely been business travel. At the end of our pilgrimage he said it had been the most fulfilling journey of his life - and the same holds true for me! We met so many extraordinary 'ordinary' people, we heard first hand their experiences of crime, atrocities and poverty, but

moreover of hope, faith and love. For both of us it was the journey of a lifetime; we were so poor when we came and so rich when we left! The late Dean Brackley SJ, a fearless and kind and very special man whom we were privileged to meet while there, summed up perfectly what the pilgrimage would do to us, and what it has indeed done: we have fallen in love with El Salvador, with the country and the people. We learnt so much from the Salvadoreans, not only kindness, happiness, forgiveness, but that there is a need for truth, so that healing of individuals and of the nation can happen. We learnt that people want not revenge but truth. The Salvadoreans smiled at us because by our presence and our sharing in their lives we were saying to them, 'you are important, you count for us, you matter'. The world has changed for us, a world that until then we half-consciously had divided has come together. We are trying to keep in touch with news from El Salvador, we are in a small way raising money for a wonderful school in La Chacra, one of the gang-ridden slum areas of San Salvador, we want to go back to the country that we owe so much, and where, in a curious way and despite the dangers around us,

fear of death evaporated. Why? Because we had for a short period experienced real life, and followed lives as they should be lived, similar to the experience of the American lay missionary Jean Donovan and the Maryknoll sisters who were martyred in December 1980. Film maker Ana Corrigan said about them, "I came to see that the meaning of their lives was so rich that death was not ultimately important."



*Portraits of Jean Donovan (top left) and the Maryknoll Sisters displayed in the historical memory museum at the UCA.*



## ROMERO WEEK 2017

### THE SECRET OF ROMERO: PASSION FOR GOD AND COMPASSION FOR THE POOR



The Romero Trust is delighted that **Martha Zechmeister CJ** has agreed to be the guest speaker for the Romero Week events in March. Martha is an Austrian religious sister, a member of the Congregation of Jesus. For the last nine years she has been teaching theology at the Jesuit University in San Salvador, and directing the Master's programme

there since 2012. She was responsible for establishing "Dean Brackley House", a hall of residence at the UCA for scholarship students from extremely poor areas.

Sr. Martha will be in Britain for a full week from Saturday 18 March and will speak in Wales, Scotland and England. She will give the address at the National Ecumenical Service at St Martin-in-the-Fields Church in Trafalgar Square on Saturday March 25<sup>th</sup> to mark the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Oscar Romero's martyrdom.

Sister Martha will speak on '**The Secret of Romero: Passion for God and Compassion for the Poor**'.

See the Dates for your Diary on page 3 for the full itinerary for Romero Week. We hope that Friends of Romero will be able to join us at one of these meetings to celebrate Archbishop Romero's life and martyrdom in this centenary year.



**VATICAN APPROVES ANNUAL  
CELEBRATION OF ROMERO FEAST  
DAY IN ST. GEORGE'S CATHEDRAL,  
SOUTHWARK**

The Feast Day of Blessed Oscar Romero is 24 March, the anniversary of his martyrdom. The Archbishop of Southwark, the Most Rev. Peter Smith, applied to have the Feast Day added to the liturgical Calendar of the Diocese. Consequently, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has granted that a 'liturgical commemoration' may be celebrated annually in St George's Cathedral, Southwark. The request was granted in recognition that "*the Cathedral is home to a national shrine... and contains a number of his relics...*' We believe this is the only such permission to have been granted outside Central America.

Archbishop Peter Smith said, "*I am delighted that the Holy See has approved this request, and hope that the example and prayers of Blessed Romero will prove a blessing to the diocese and to all who visit the Cathedral*". The Trust

shares his delight, as it supported the application.



***A copy of the indult***

St. George's Cathedral, Southwark dedicated a prayer space to Romero in 2013, with a large Salvadorean Cross painted by Salvadorean artist Fernando Llort. The cross, known as the "Romero Cross" is a reliquary, containing a fragment of Archbishop Romero's blood-stained alb and his zucchetto.

Bishop Patrick Lynch, auxiliary bishop in Southwark and titular bishop of Castro, will celebrate the 12.30pm Mass in St George's Cathedral on Friday 24 March

2017 in honour of the memory of Blessed Oscar Romero, the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his assassination. Bishop Lynch will use the new collect prayer for Blessed Oscar Romero.

The intention of the Mass will be for the repose of the soul of Bishop Michael Evans, former bishop of East Anglia and priest of the diocese of Southwark for nearly 28 years. He had a great admiration and devotion for Oscar Romero, and was a founding trustee of the Archbishop Romero Trust.

***All are welcome.***



*The Romero Cross Reliquary in St. George's Cathedral, Southwark*

## ANNUAL LECTURE 2016 ROMERO, RUTILIO AND POPE FRANCIS

Father Rodolfo Cardenal SJ was our guest speaker for the Annual Lecture in November. He is head of the Monseñor Romero Centre at the UCA (the Jesuit run university in San Salvador), and headed the Historical Commission in the diocesan process for Rutilio Grande's beatification. The beatification Cause formally opened in Rome on 22 November. It was to him that Pope Francis said “Rutilio’s great miracle is Archbishop Romero”.

In the lecture, Father Rodolfo examined the friendship between Rutilio Grande and Romero, their differences and similarities, and argued that, “one cannot understand Romero without Rutilio”.

You can catch up on the lecture in two ways: download the full text or watch the webinar. Both are available through the Romero Trust website at this link:

<http://www.romerotrusted.org.uk/news/romero-lecture-2016-rutilio-and-romero> .



*Romero and Rutilio jointly greet visitors to El Paisnal*

**BOOK REVIEW:  
ROMERO & GRANDE: COMPANIONS  
ON THE JOURNEY**

Sister Ana María Pineda's book is a delight to read. Well-written with academic professionalism it does an excellent job of tracing the lives of Archbishop Romero and Rutilio Grande and how they became intertwined. We encounter these two iconic men from their human frailty; we see the work they did and then the martyrdom they

suffered. The Pineda and the Grande families are connected and Ana María is a not-so-distant relative of Rutilio. Great affection for Rutilio and Romero is evident throughout this 'labour of love'. Highly recommended as Rutilio's beatification approaches.



**Romero & Grande: Companions on the Journey** by Ana María Pineda published by Lectio. Available from the Trust for £13 (incl. p&p).

**OSCAR ROMERO PLAY AND  
RETREAT DAYS**

*RISE Theatre CIC are offering performances of a new play about Romero.*

'Blessed Oscar Romero – Modern Martyr' is a new play by RISE Theatre looking at the life and legacy of a man who chose to challenge those in power and stand up for social justice. Through this thought-provoking play, students have an opportunity to explore

important themes relating to the world in which we live – solidarity with the poor, promoting social justice, standing up for what is right, actively living out our faith. The challenge to us all is summed up in Blessed Oscar Romero's famous quote:

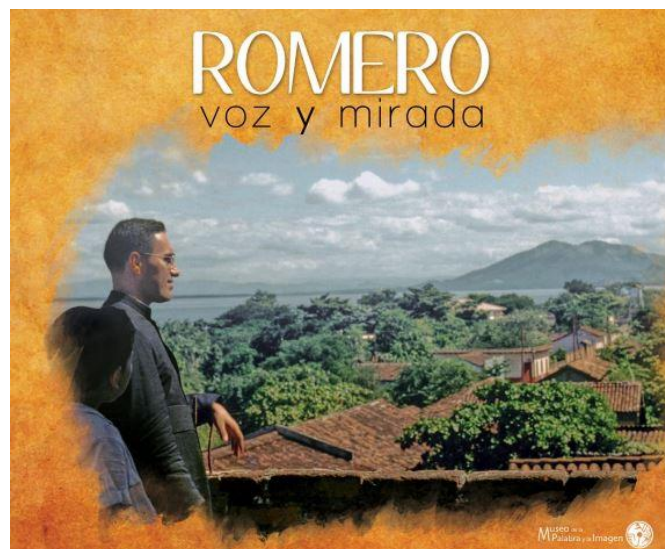
**Aspire**  
not to  
**have more**  
but to **be**  
**more**

RISE Theatre CIC is a professional Christian theatre company with a passion for delivering exciting, original, transformative theatre. **RISE Theatre** is run as a not-for-profit Community Interest Company. We work at schools, churches, events and festivals across the UK with the aim of inspiring people of all ages to realise their full potential in life.

Find out more about RISE Theatre and the Romero play and how to book them for a school or community event at their website:

<http://www.risetheatre.co.uk/blessed-oscar-romero-1>

## ROMERO: VOZ Y MIRADA



Romero: Voz y Mirada (“Romero: Voice and Gaze”) was the title of an exhibition organised by the Museo de la Palabra y el Imagen in 2011. It showcased photos that had been entrusted by Romero to Señora Santos Delmi Campos de Cabrera and her son Julio César Cabrera who looked after them for 30 years. This is the companion book for the exhibition. Some of the photos have been used in this Romero News to illustrate the following article by Martin Maier. However, you may like to look at the full publication, available to view electronically through the Museo de la Palabra y el Imagen webpage: <http://museo.com.sv/2011/07/romero-voz-y-mirada/>

(When you click on the image of the book on the webpage, you will be directed to the publication on ISSUU. Please note, the publication text is in Spanish.)

## ARCHBISHOP ROMERO AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

*Jesuit theologian, Martin Maier, explores the association between Romero and Liberation Theology. This is a short version of a longer essay by Martin Maier which you can read in full at this link: [goo.gl/zl1nHp](http://goo.gl/zl1nHp) . Our thanks to Brendan Walsh for his skilled work abridging it for Romero News.*



Some try to disassociate Monseñor Romero completely from liberation

theology. Others say that Romero was a liberation theologian. Neither camp is right.

The issue is complicated - partly because Romero underwent a profound change in his attitude towards liberation theology during the course of his life. As director of the diocesan weekly bulletin *Orientación* from 1971 to 1974, when he was an auxiliary bishop in the archdiocese of San Salvador, Romero was a strong critic of liberation theology. He saw grave dangers in mixing religion and politics. The second Vatican Council and the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Medellin in 1968 had recognised that Christians have a responsibility to become politically engaged and to work for justice and human rights. But this had not been looked upon favourably by those in the Church who were comfortable with the status quo. They were opposed to any form of social or political change.

In November 1975, in a confidential memorandum for the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, Romero was critical of the activities of the Jesuits in El Salvador, particularly the theology being taught at the Central America

University. As well as the “political theology” of Ignacio Ellacuría, Romero drew Rome’s attention to the “new Christology” of Jon Sobrino. There was a swift response from the Vatican. For the first time, Sobrino and Ellacuría had to justify the orthodoxy of their theology.

### Conversion

In a homily in the cathedral in San Salvador on 6 August 1976, Romero spoke of Christ as the Saviour, but warned people not to think of liberation only in a material sense. He did not mention social conflicts. Rather, he attacked the so-called “new christologies”. Without mentioning any names, it was clear that he was referring to Jon Sobrino. “I didn’t go to the Mass,” Sobrino later recalled, “but a few hours afterwards a priest brought me a recording of [Romero’s] homily. I listened and I froze ... It was a full-on attack on my Christology.”

Yet just one year later Sobrino had become one of Romero’s closest theological advisors. What had happened? In February 1977, the theologically cautious Romero was appointed archbishop of San Salvador. Monseñor Arturo Rivera y Damas, who

was to succeed Romero as archbishop, agrees with those who speak of Romero’s “conversion” on becoming archbishop, but he does not consider his conversion to have been sudden and spectacular, like that of Saint Paul on the road to Damascus. Though the murder of Father Rutilio Grande and his two companions on 12 March 1977, shortly after Romero’s appointment as archbishop, was a decisive moment, Rivera believes his conversion was “a long and progressive process of maturity throughout his life.” Rivera put it beautifully: “A martyr gave life to another martyr. Before the body of Father Rutilio Grande, Monseñor Romero, on his twentieth day as archbishop, felt the call of Christ to overcome his natural human shyness and be filled with apostolic courage. From that moment, Monseñor Romero left behind the pagan lands of Tyre and Sidon, and marched boldly towards Jerusalem.”

As Pope Francis has reportedly said, “Rutilio’s great miracle is Monseñor Romero.”

There are still those who try to distance Archbishop Romero from liberation

theology, as though liberation theology was something contagious and extremely dangerous. But they caricature and demonise liberation theology. They claim it is impregnated with Marxism and that it justifies and encourages violence. Ignacio Ellacuría has made it clear that the liberation theology represented by himself and Jon Sobrino is not influenced in any way by Marxism.

**Let's look in more detail at Romero's relationship with liberation theology.**

Liberation theology in my understanding has three basic principles. The first and most important is the option for the poor. The God of Israel is always seen in liberation theology as a God on the side of the oppressed, the weak, orphans and widows, the stranger. This is God in the image of Jesus, who proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God for the poor. The second principle is the attention that liberation theology always pays to the signs of the times. The history of salvation is seen as closely connected to the history of the people of the world. And the third principle is that liberation theology seeks to make a contribution to change the world, not just to understand it.

The option for the poor is rooted in the belief that every human being has been made in the image and likeness of God. And when talking about the terrible human rights violations in El Salvador, Archbishop Romero refers over and over again to man's likeness to God:

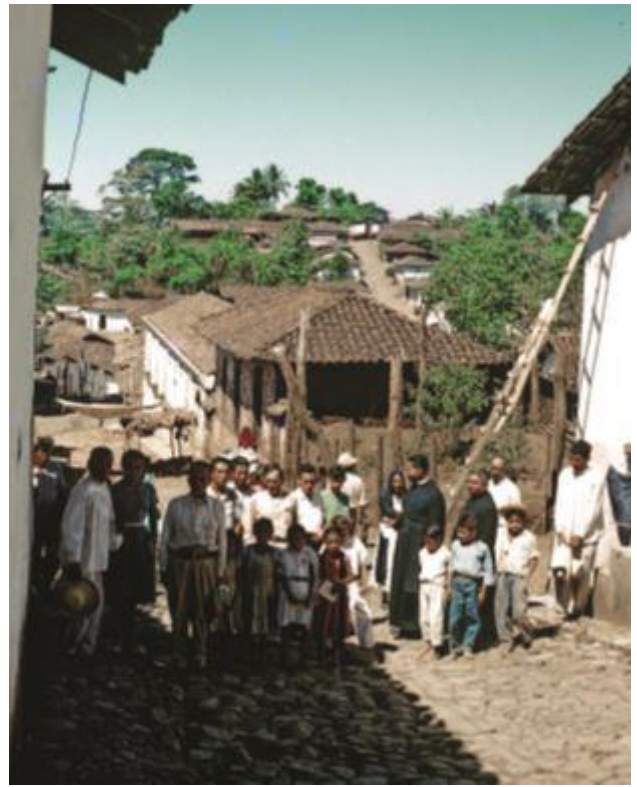
“There is no dichotomy between the image of God and man. If you torture a fellow human, if you offend another human, if you destroy another human, you are offending the image of God and the Church feels that this is her martyrdom, her cross.”

God shows his preference for the poor in his incarnation in Jesus Christ. The movement of the incarnation is from above downwards, from the glory of God to the limitations and poverty of humans. Theologians use the Greek work *kenosis* to describe this self-alienation of God. In one of his homilies, Romero compares the *kenosis* of God to a king who abandons his throne, shrugs off his royal vestments, dresses in the rags of the rural poor and lives among them undetected. So it was that Christ dressed himself as a human being, and appeared as an ordinary person. More, Christ was not content with being an ordinary

person, he became a slave and suffered the death of a slave on the cross. Romero applies this divine movement, *kenosis*, to the Church: the Church must be poor and humble, it has to be a Church from below.

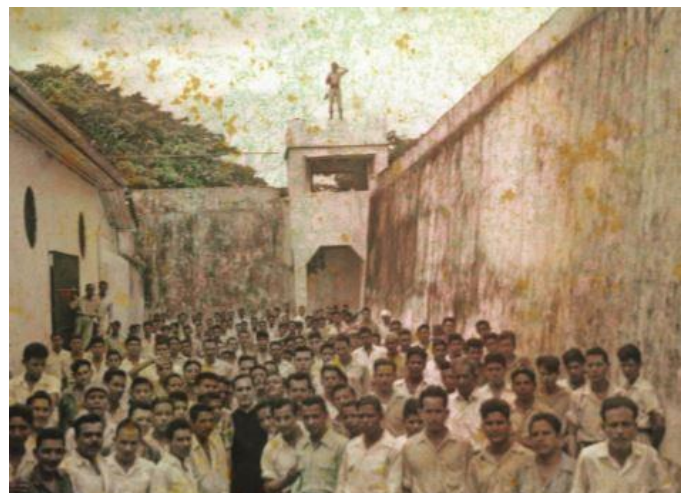
The option for the poor characterised Jesus' earthly life. He did not live in palaces; he was at home amongst simple people. The poor held the first place in his beatitudes. In the parable of the final judgement, he identifies with the most needy. "God purposely chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise; and he chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the powerful." (1 Cor 1:27).

The option for the poor runs through the Bible like a golden thread; it is at the heart of all Romero's preaching, and it is the secret to understanding him. Romero found God in the poor. This was the most joyous experience of his life. In his homilies, he repeats over and again the jubilant cry of Jesus: "Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I thank you because you have shown to the unlearned what you have hidden from the wise and learned. Yes, Father, this was how you wanted it to happen" (Matt. 11:25-26).



*Ciudad Barrios, San Miguel*

The 12-year-old child Jesus seeks God in the temple, in conversation with the scribes, the "wise and learned". But the itinerant preacher of Galilee finds God amongst the poor, the children and the socially marginalised.



*In San Miguel Prison*



Oscar Romero experienced this development too. One of his exclamations of the jubilant cry of Jesus is, “I have known God because I have known my people.” Romero knew very well the frightening reality of poverty. He did not romanticise it. It has to be fought, it has to be eradicated. He knew about the exploitation of women by men, he knew the destructive effect of alcoholism and violence.

A second essential dimension to Romero’s preaching was his constant search for the will of God in the changing circumstances of history. He believed that God shows himself in events, that God’s will can be read in the signs of the times. He gave a lot of attention to the “events of the week” in his homilies. In the context of a state-controlled press and deliberately peddled lies, Romero simply reported the truth about what was happening. He dignified the victims by naming each of them. Whenever possible, he named the abusers. He rebutted accusations that the “events of the week” had nothing to do with the Church’s mission of evangelisation: “The task of someone who really reflects on the word of God is to illuminate the signs of the times with the word of God; so that

history and the present day have a sense of unity with God and they may move towards God.”

St. Ignatius of Loyola says in his *Exercises* that love has to be expressed through actions more than through words. And a third essential dimension to Romero’s life and work is his insistence that the truth of the gospel has to be lived, made real.

He practised what he preached. He was authentic. His life and death were in themselves a homily, a good news.

In his famous poem, written in response to his assassination, Pedro Casaldáliga says of Romero, “No one will silence your last homily,”



*(Location and event unknown)*

A Church that is faithful to the Gospel and to the way of Christ will inevitably find

itself in conflict. This was Romero's experience: "The Church is persecuted because she wants to be the true Church of Christ. If the Church preaches eternal salvation without getting involved in the real problems of the world, it is respected and appreciated, and even rewarded with privileges. But if its mission is to denounce the sins that force people into poverty, and if it proclaims the hope of a more just and humane world, then it suffers persecution and calumny and is called subversive and communist."

Pope Francis, too, is labelled a "Marxist" by ultra-conservatives because of his tough criticism of the dominant neo-liberal economic system.

So we can see how the three main principles of liberation theology run through Romero's homilies and pastoral letters and mark his whole life as a priest and archbishop.

### **The Suffering Christ**

Romero was inspired by liberation theology - but he also came to nourish theologians such as Ellacuría and Sobrino. His deepest and most creative spiritual and theological insight was to liken the passion of the Salvadorean

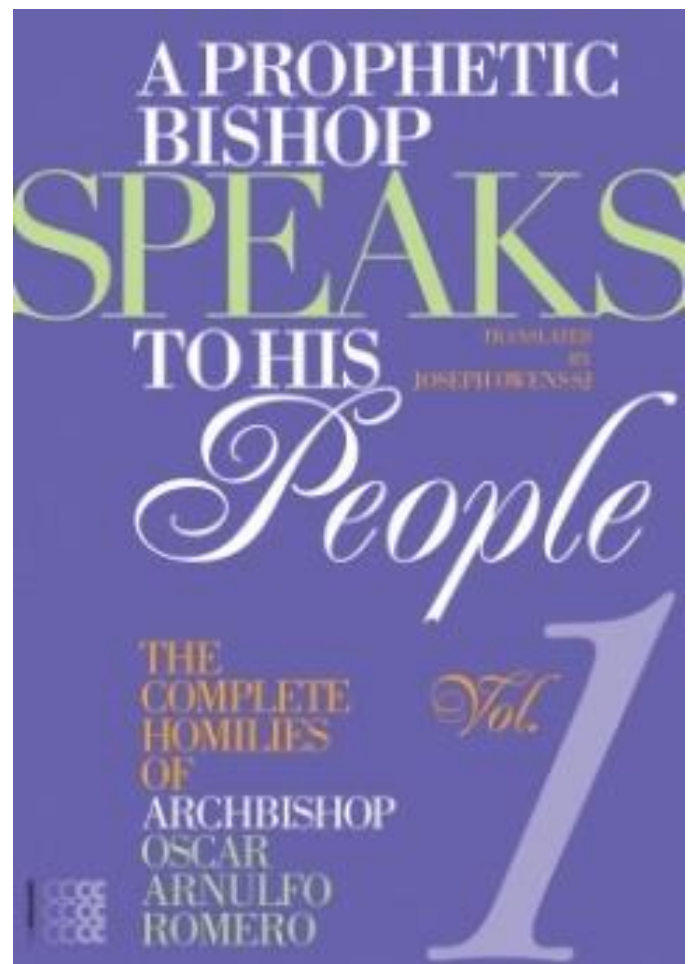
people with the crucified Christ. In his homily for the first anniversary of the assassination of Rutilio Grande, he recalled that, as a Jesuit, Grande had searched for an encounter with Jesus in spiritual retreats. But the image of Christ, explained Romero, "is not discovered through spiritual retreats alone, but through entering into life here, where Christ is suffering flesh, where Christ is to be found in the persecution, where Christ is the men sleeping in the field because they cannot sleep in their homes, where Christ is in the illness caused by long exposure to the elements; here is Christ, carrying his cross on his shoulders, not in a chapel beside the stations of the cross, but alive in the people; this is Christ with his cross on the road to Calvary."

As Jon Sobrino says "Romero's theology was, in the most precise evangelical and historical sense, a theology of liberation; Christian theology, based on the revelation of God and the tradition and magisterium of the Church and Latin American theology, gathering up and responding always to the suffering and hopes of these crucified people."

## ROMERO'S PROPHETIC PREACHING

*Joseph Owens translated Romero's homilies into English. The complete collection is now available to purchase through the Romero Trust (see the Book Offers section below). We asked him to tell us something about his understanding of Romero's preaching, following this herculean translation task.*

When I began translating Archbishop Romero's homilies in 2012, I often found myself wishing that he had written them out beforehand. He did not, of course, but rather spoke spontaneously, using notes that he had carefully prepared in the course of the week. Instead of finely crafted rhetorical phrases, Romero uttered declarations from the depths of his being, and while his unrehearsed language sometimes left this translator confused, the millions of Salvadoreans who listened to him every week understood exactly what he was saying. As I progressed through the homilies it became clear to me that, despite their spontaneity, they communicated quite effectively Romero's profound theological vision about how God works in the church and in the world.



### **The Structure of Romero's Homilies**

Almost all the homilies Oscar Romero preached during his years as archbishop of San Salvador had three interrelated parts: 1) reflection on the scripture readings of the day, 2) consideration of the life of the local and the universal church, and 3) analysis of the “events of the week.” These three regular components of Romero's preaching were more than just a convenient framework for organizing his thoughts. Their interconnection reveals a great deal about how he understood the role of the Christian community in the world. For

Romero, Christian faith was an intense, Spirit-driven dynamism that progressed from scriptural vision to ecclesial communion to social transformation, a movement that could not be blocked without betraying the heart of the Gospel.

The scriptures for Romero were not just a collection of ancient texts from which sundry verses could be cherry-picked to corroborate his statements. Rather, those sacred writings were telling the concrete history of people who had suffered greatly but who had also vividly experienced God working in their midst and helping them to overcome the formidable difficulties they faced. When Romero read the Bible, he understood that it was not simply recounting the history of other peoples who lived in other times; it was the history of his own people, with all their trials and tribulations. Moreover, for Romero the scriptures were God's efficacious Word, a Word that was capable not only of creating the entire world out of nothing, but of creating a new history in the midst of human misery. The prophetic Word not only proposed God's future, it brought that future into being.

**“ THE CITIZEN OF HEAVEN  
MUST FIRST BE A GOOD  
CITIZEN ON EARTH.  
THOSE WHO WANT TO  
TAKE PART IN THE  
PROMISES OF ETERNITY  
MUST COLLABORATE  
WITH GOD IN JUSTICE  
AND PEACE AND LOVE IN  
THIS KINGDOM OF  
EARTH.”**

-BLESSED OSCAR ROMERO  
EPIPHANY OF THE LORD 1978

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The Archbishop  
Romero Trust

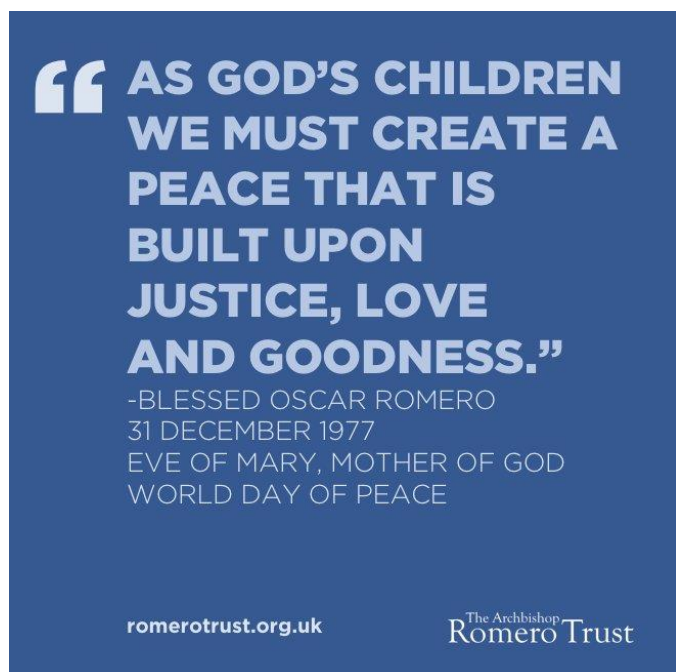
The central message of the Scriptures is that God works first and foremost in history, and he does so through the formation of human communities in which social relationships have been transformed. They are communities where there is forgiveness and reconciliation, where violence is banished, where a new justice becomes manifest: a justice based on generosity rather than meanness, on equality rather than retribution. They are communities in which God's project for humankind becomes plainly visible.

For Romero, these communities took on concrete form in the Church, and that is why in the second part of his homilies he always examined the state of his archdiocese. Every week he visited

several local communities around the archdiocese, and in his Sunday homilies he reported back on what he found there. He had great faith in the “ecclesial base communities,” the small groups of lay people who gathered on a regular basis to reflect on the scriptures, to study the social situation of the country, to consider their responsibility as Christians, and to commit themselves to transformative action for the common good. While recognising the need for hierarchical structures, Romero saw the role of the base communities as crucial to the life of the Church. He firmly believed that the Spirit was working mightily among the poor to build up God’s kingdom in ways that would counteract and overcome the fierce forces oppressing them.

The ecclesial communities were to be modelled on and inspired by the vision presented in the biblical texts, but they could not content themselves with existing as closed groups in devout isolation. As God’s active agents for change in society, they were obliged to look at the world around them, to analyse its problems, and to seek humane solutions. As he contemplated his conflicted country, Romero realised that a truly apocalyptic struggle was taking place between the forces of the oligarchy and the forces of the people. He roundly denounced the project of the oligarchy as idolatrous and ruinous since it sought only the interests of a tiny clique and refused to consider the good of the country as a whole. In no way could the Church and the ecclesial communities support such a project.

But what was the alternative? How should the Christian communities relate to the restless, rebellious forces of the people? Romero devoted much thought and prayer to this question; he consulted with theologians, organisers, and lay catechists. He wrote a pastoral letter precisely on this topic: “The Church and the People’s Political Organizations.” In



many of his homilies he treated the question of how the Church should relate to the vast gamut of grass-roots organisations, which ranged from trade unions and peasant organisations to political coalitions and armed guerrilla forces. Romero's consistent message was that the Church is not itself a political organisation and should not directly support any particular political force. Nevertheless, the Church is the faithful messenger announcing God's Word, and that Word incessantly summons the people to transform a world plagued with injustice, suffering, ecological destruction, and inequality.


The third part of Romero's homilies, his report on the "events of the week," was the part most keenly heard and carefully scrutinized by his nationwide audience, friend and foe alike. Like the prophets of old, Romero was not reluctant to name names and denounce crimes, but in doing so he was not presuming to act as prosecutor and judge. Yes, he wanted the civil authorities to take action to stop the bloody killings, the cruel kidnappings, and the savage treatment of workers and peasants, but more than anything he was summoning his faithful Christians to rise

up and oppose the barbarism of the regime. While always advocating non-violence, he encouraged his people to demonstrate for their rights, to join organisations working for justice, and to engage in active resistance to oppression.

But more than anything he wanted them to join together in ecclesial communities that would be living models for the revolutionary new social relations that Jesus preached to his disciples. He called for a society where social differences were obliterated and people lived together as equals.

**“ WE MUST CREATE A SOCIETY WHERE PEACE IS NOT ONLY A BALANCE OF FEAR, WHERE PEACE IS NOT SIMPLY THE SILENCE OF CEMETERIES, BUT WHERE PEACE IS THE JOYFUL DYNAMIC OF A GOD OF PEACE.”**

-BLESSED OSCAR ROMERO  
31 DECEMBER 1977  
EVE OF MARY, MOTHER OF GOD  
WORLD DAY OF PEACE

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The three parts of the homilies, then, are all essential to an authentic proclamation of the Gospel message.<sup>1)</sup> The true

meaning of Scripture gets revealed only in a concrete community which is actively confronting the social reality surrounding it. 2) Community uninspired by Scripture and withdrawn from worldly conflict is only a shadow of what the Gospel is calling for. 3) Social analysis and action devoid of scriptural inspiration and disconnected from authentic community can never resolve the grievous problems facing humankind. Preachers everywhere would profit greatly from imitating the dynamic progression of Romero's sermons: 1) from hearing the Word as disciples 2) to bringing it to life in communities 3) to making it reality in a radically transformed society.

### **Preaching To Create Transformative Communities**

For Archbishop Romero, preaching should challenge our complacency: "Preaching that awakens and enlightens people is like a light that is turned on. If some people are asleep, naturally they are disturbed, but they wake up! That is the preaching of Christ: 'Wake up! Be converted!' This is also the church's authentic preaching. Naturally, sisters and brothers, such preaching gives rise to conflict; it forfeits worldly prestige; it

bothers people and will surely be persecuted. The church's preaching cannot get along with the powers of darkness and sin." But preaching should also be a source of strength for the community: "The kingdom of God is formed by all of us who humbly desire to follow Christ the Redeemer. As Jesus said, we must be a people of light, a people of strength, a people that is leaven in the dough, a light to the world, and salt of the earth. This is the aim of our Sunday preaching. I am grateful to the Lord for the good will of all of you who listen by radio and all of you who fill the cathedral, because your presence and your attention are a sign of profound hope. Let us build within our community a kingdom of God that is solid, intimate, and holy so that it radiates the beauty, hope, and light that our country is searching for" (22 January 1978). That was Romero's one desire: preaching the Word that creates the community that transforms the world.



**FINDING PERSONAL STRENGTH TO  
DEFEND JUSTICE AND HUMAN  
DIGNITY IN DARK TIMES**

**PERSONAL MEMORIES OF BLESSED  
OSCAR A. ROMERO**

*The new Ambassador to the UK for El Salvador is Lidia Elizabeth Hayek Weinmann. In her toast to the Queen as she took up her role, the Ambassador put Romero centre stage. The Ambassador spoke from the privileged position of one who has first-hand experience of Blessed Romero. Here she shares some of her personal memories with us.*

By the mid 70's the Miramonte neighbourhood in San Salvador was a new, promising, ideal suburban place to live. Middle class families moved there from the city centre –still ravaged by the earthquake of 1965- to what felt like modern, forward looking rows of family houses with small gardens. The architectural design was directly borrowed from the United States' suburban style with its own 'shopping mall' included, the very first in the country. Built in what was until then a coffee plantation, it retained a certain feeling of remoteness from the buzzing streets of the old city.

To the north of Miramonte, amidst remaining pockets of small farms, a charity hospital was built. The Divine Providence Hospital was the brain-and-heart child of Sister Luz Isabel Cuevas, a Mexican nun who was a Carmelite Missionary sister of Saint Theresa. The hospital was opened to provide medical care to terminally ill cancer patients who couldn't afford to pay for the treatment they needed; a chapel was built alongside the Hospital's pavilions.

When Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero was appointed as San Salvador's Archbishop, a small and modest house was built within the Hospital grounds to serve as his permanent residence. The simplicity of this accommodation, just to the right after the entrance gate, still speaks of the humility of its former occupant.



My grandmother's home was a short walk from the Hospital and she used to go there to attend the daily evening mass, often celebrated by Archbishop Romero. She was in her late 80's and still had the vitality that was the hallmark of



her character throughout her life. She was no stranger to suffering and had first-hand experience witnessing the devastations of war in her native place of birth, a small Christian village in northern Lebanon, where she saw her mother die during the famine caused there by the First World War. In Archbishop Romero's homilies she found a clear, direct, message that spoke of his faith in human dignity as the embodiment of the Christian values of love, a message of compassion and empathy with the suffering of others. The concept of those values as a source of inner strength to face difficult times spoke directly to her own experience.

Some years later, when she was no longer able to walk the short distance to the Hospital's Chapel, Archbishop Romero would go to her house to give her Holy Communion and always stayed for a few moments just to talk about every day hopes and worries. At those moments, in the private space of a family home, I came to know the Monseñor Romero that lives in my memory: a quiet, soft-spoken person, an attentive listener who would provide a word of comfort and guidance with modesty –without any hint of self-righteousness-, in a language that

was both simple and powerful. I came to know him as a shy, self-effacing, but deeply thoughtful person.

When I contrast these attributes of his personality with the prominence he gained as he fulfilled his role as the nation's spiritual pastor, giving his 'voice to the voiceless', I cannot but think how unlikely a candidate he was to become a public figure. As a man, he did not seek nor enjoy being in the spotlight.

Despite his shyness he found the inner strength to take the role that was required of him; the inner strength to face the ultimate consequences of being true to his spiritual convictions –of which he was fully aware-, laying down his life in the Christian tradition. God's given grace made him a pastor and a powerful voice to bear witness to the suffering he found in the innumerable personal stories of those who came seeking a word of comfort and guidance from him.

His beatification by the Holy See in May of 2015 bestows the highest-level of international recognition to the work and legacy of a man that for many Salvadoreans represented a beacon of

hope and faith in humanity, even amidst the darkest of days of our civil war. It is a recognition given to a champion of peace, justice and human dignity, whose message rings particularly true in the troubled world of today.

Here in the United Kingdom, Archbishop Romero's legacy has long been recognised and admired. It is in London, high atop Westminster Abbey's main entrance, that he first found a home away from home.



*Westminster Abbey*

It is with this image in mind that I am particularly humbled to have been granted the opportunity to represent my country here, in the United Kingdom. It is with a great sense of honour and commitment that I look forward to working to strengthen the ties of friendship between El Salvador and the United Kingdom. A friendship underpinned by those principles for

which Archbishop Romero worked and died – a set of universal values cherished by both of our peoples.

## **PROGRESS, DIGNITY AND SELF-DETERMINATION: A LEGACY OF ROMERO**

*Bishop John Arnold of Salford Diocese visited El Salvador in his capacity of Chair of CAFOD. No trip to El Salvador would be complete without an element of the programme dedicated to finding Romero.*



*Bishop John Arnold capturing a view of San Salvador*

My first visit to El Salvador, in November 2016, brought my fairly scant knowledge of Archbishop Romero to life, with something of a shock! While I knew a certain amount about his ministry and martyrdom, I could not claim any detailed knowledge. In the days before my arrival I had read "Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic" by Maria Lopez Vigil and learned

much about the humanity of the Archbishop and glimpsed the development of that spirituality in him which gave him the courage that underpinned his ministry, making him such a powerful advocate of truth and the dignity of the human person. Our frequent mistake is to assume that a saint is somehow other-worldly and born from a particularly superior “saintly” mould, whereas saints are just human beings like ourselves who make a radical commitment to pursue holiness and justice in their lives, often despite human weakness and failures. Saints are not born saints; they grow into holiness. Oscar Romero grew in his holiness in response to the challenges he encountered and yet he always remained simply one of his people. Pope Francis would surely confirm that this Archbishop knew “the smell of the sheep” through his close association with their struggles and troubles.



*“With Monseñor Romero, God passed through El Salvador” Ignacio Ellacuría, SJ*

Visits to his tomb at the Cathedral in San Salvador and to his home and the place of his martyrdom at the “hospitalito” were important aspects of a privileged pilgrimage but the real impact of the Archbishop came for me in his spirit which seemed so present in the energy of the people that we met and the projects that we visited. The University of Central America was impressive for the way it presented its education for the purpose of change and development, moving beyond simply being a place of learning. It was the spirit of Oscar Romero which was so clearly part of the ethos and the foundation for so many of the students’ extra-curricular activities that included media, performing arts and social action. We visited a school where pupils engage in organising out of school activities to draw young people away from involvement with gangs. There was a remarkable “graduation day” for a group of women who, for the first time, were learning trades which provided them with some independence and money in their pockets to provide school fees and books for their children.

El Salvador still ranks among the poorer nations, despite considerable growth and

development which really only benefits a small percentage of wealthy citizens. There is still much violence and the gangs still hold a firm grip on all too many communities. But there is progress and a dignity and a self-determination that is, without doubt, the legacy of Oscar Romero and his conviction that people have rights and dignity which will be established.



*“Graduation day” for women learning to run small businesses and build their self-esteem with CAFOD support.*

## BOOK OFFERS AND POSTCARDS

*All these resources may be ordered from [romerotrust@gmail.com](mailto:romerotrust@gmail.com)*

**Or by post:**

*Archbishop Romero Trust  
PO Box 70227  
London  
E9 9BR*

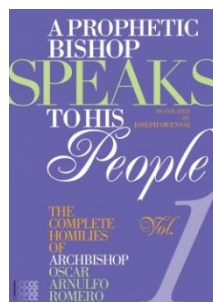


**Postcards from St. Albans Cathedral for sale: 6 for £3 (incl. p&p) postage)**



**Jesus and the Prodigal Son: The God of Radical Mercy** by Brian Pierce OP. In this imaginative and moving work, Brian Pierce OP, Romero Trust guest

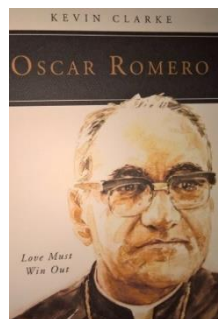
speaker in March 2015, brings a startling perspective to the familiar story of the Prodigal Son. Starting with the words of the father, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again," Fr. Brian imagines the parable as a commentary on the story of Jesus himself. £12 (incl. p&p)



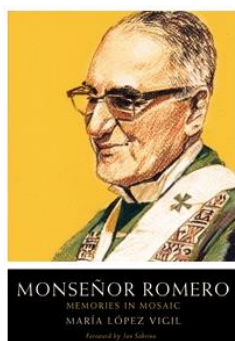
**A Prophetic Bishop Speaks to His People: The Complete Homilies of Oscar Arnulfo Romero,**

All six Volumes are now available, £20 each (incl. p&p). Readers encounter Romero the way ordinary Salvadoreans did—through his sermons, which are brought to a startling new level of clarity

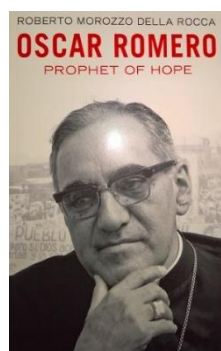
and precision. This new set of translations, elegant and mellifluous, is a reference set that no Romero student can do without.



**Oscar Romero – Love Must Win Out** by Kevin Clarke, published by Liturgical Press, on sale at £7.95. **Available from the Trust for £7 (incl. p&p).** An excellent and very readable short introduction to the life of Archbishop Romero.



**Oscar Romero: Memories in Mosaic** £15 (incl. p&p) Romero remembered by the people who knew him.



**Oscar Romero - Prophet of Hope** by Roberto Morozzo della Rocca published by DLT in Britain on sale at £9.99. **Available from the Trust for £8 (incl. p&p.)**

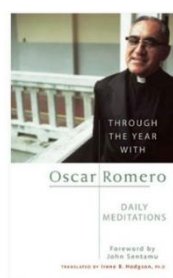
This is a comprehensive biography written by one of the authors of the documentation that secured Archbishop

Romero's beatification. It's a full treatment but in presenting Romero for sainthood he downplays his respect for Jon Sobrino and other liberation theologians. Well worth reading.



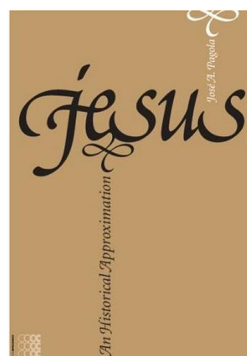
**Oscar Romero and the Communion of Saints** £12 (incl. p&p) A special joy of this biography are the many rarely-seen photographs taken by

Octavio Durán, a Franciscan friar, who served as Romero's personal photographer.



**Through the Year with Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations** £8 (incl. p&p) Powerful and moving selections from Blessed

Romero's broadcast homilies.



**Jesus, an Historical Approximation** £24 (incl. p&p) from the Trust. Also available in bookshops for £34

Author Mons José Antonio Pagola presents a lively and passionate narrative of Jesus, addressing basic questions about who

he was, the originality of his message and how the vision of the Kingdom of God centred his life. A profound theological reflection about Jesus.

*"At my age, I no longer read many books, but I read Pagola's from cover to cover. It has helped me grow in age, wisdom and grace. I recommend it to many people, Christians and non-believers. Monseñor Romero would have quoted from it in his Sunday homilies." Jon Sobrino SJ*

## FRIENDS OF ROMERO

Thank you for your ongoing support as Friends of Romero. There are around 500 *Friends of Romero* who belong to our solidarity network. Your donations help produce the Romero News newsletter and to put on events such as Romero Week and the Romero lecture.

The Trust's reserves are almost depleted. If you would like to make a donation to our work in this centenary year we would be hugely grateful. Please send cheques payable to the Romero Trust to our PO Box address (Archbishop

Romero Trust, PO Box 70227, London E9 9BR) or give online at our website – [www.romerotrust.org.uk](http://www.romerotrust.org.uk) .

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### Picture credits:

*Johan Bergström-Allen: page 10 (Romero Cross Reliquary*

*Julian Filochowski: pages 4, 8, 11*

*Jutta Davis: page 6*

*Tania Dalton/CAFOD: pages 7, 26 (abbey)*

*Museo de la Palabra y el Imagen: pages 16,17*

*Clare Dixon/CAFOD: pages 26 (Bishop John Arnold), 28*

*Ben White/CAFOD: page 27*

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# The Archbishop Romero Trust

## Romero Centenary Events

### Romero Week: March 2017

*Sr Martha Zechmeister CJ teaches theology at the UCA in San Salvador. She is the guest speaker for Romero Week.*

*She will speak on *The Secret of Romero: Passion for God and Compassion for the Poor.**

**Saturday, 18 March** – St Mary’s Cathedral, Wrexham LL11 1RB  
12noon Mass with Bishop Peter Brignall; 2pm talk

**Sunday, 19 March** – Cathedral of Christ the King, Liverpool L3 5TQ  
11am Mass with Archbishop Malcolm McMahon OP; preacher: Bishop John Rawsthorne

**Monday, 20 March** – Lauriston Jesuit Centre, Edinburgh EH3 9DJ  
7.30pm service and lecture

**Tuesday, 21 March** – St Aloysius College, Glasgow  
7pm service and lecture

**Thursday, 23 March** – St Marie’s Cathedral, Sheffield S1 2JB  
7pm lecture

**Friday, 24 March** – St George’s Cathedral, Southwark SE1 7HY  
12.30pm Mass with Bishop Patrick Lynch SSCC on the feast day of Blessed Oscar Romero, followed by light refreshments  
7pm talk at St Thomas of Canterbury Church, Canterbury CT1 2HJ

**Saturday, 25 March** – St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square, London  
11am Ecumenical Service

### Romero’s Birthday

Saturday, 12 August – St George’s Cathedral, Southwark SE1 7HY  
12.30pm Mass with Archbishop Peter Smith; preacher: Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia marking the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Blessed Oscar Romero

### Romero Day

Saturday, 23 September – London  
With activities and events to mark the Romero Centenary, culminating in 3.15pm Evensong at Westminster Abbey; preacher – Lord Rowan Williams including the debut of a new piece by James MacMillan, commissioned for the occasion

### Romero Pilgrimage 2017

13-25 November. In this special year, follow in the footsteps of Romero on a pilgrimage to El Salvador. Visit where Romero was born, as well as where he was martyred on 24 March 1980. An incredible, unforgettable experience. More information from Anthony R. Coles: arctc@btinternet.com or call 020 7431 3414.

### Romero Lecture 2017

Thursday, 30 November – Las Casas Institute, Blackfriars, Oxford  
5pm, Romero Lecture 2017: Gustavo Gutiérrez OP, father of liberation theology

*There are also events being planned in Birmingham and Plymouth during the year.  
Check [romerotrust.org.uk](http://romerotrust.org.uk) for latest information.*

ROMERO WEEK 2017

# The Secret of Romero – *Passion for God and Compassion for the Poor*

*Speaker*

**Martha Zechmeister CJ**

Professor of Systematic Theology, El Salvador



**Wrexham**

Saturday 18 March at 2.00pm – Wrexham Cathedral

**Edinburgh**

Monday 20 March at 7.30pm – Lauriston Centre

**Glasgow**

Tuesday 21 March at 7.00pm – St Aloysius College

**Sheffield**

Thursday 23 March at 7.00pm – St Marie's Cathedral

**Canterbury**

Friday 24 March at 7.30pm – St Thomas of Canterbury Church

**London**

Saturday 25 March at 11.00am – St Martin-in-the-Fields Church

**Horsham**

Saturday 25 March at 4.00pm – St John the Evangelist Church

**ALL ARE WELCOME**

The Archbishop  
**Romero Trust**

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CAFOD.org.uk

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aid

**SCMF**

**FAITH CHRIST**



**MISSIO**

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