

*"Who are these, robed in white,
and where have they come from?"*

Oscar Romero
Archbishop of San Salvador, 1980,
and a Martyr of El Salvador

Peter Menkin, Obl Cam OSB

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On the web: <http://www.io.com/~kellywp/LesserFF/Mar/Romero.html>

[Revelation 7:13-17](#)

[Psalm 31:15-24](#)

[John 12:23-32](#)

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Archbishop Oscar Romero, martyr, entered the popular mind of the world when he was assassinated in El Salvador. The film "Romero," circa 1989 and reviewed by Roger Ebert, made him ever more part of the popular culture. Film reviewer Ebert writes in 1989 of the 1980 assassination:

The film has a good heart, and the Julia performance is an interesting one, restrained and considered. This Romero is not a firebrand but a reasonable man who cannot deny the evidence of his eyes and his conscience. The film's weakness is a certain implacable predictability: We can feel at every moment what must happen next, and the over-all trajectory of the film seems ordained even in the first few shots. As a result, the film doesn't stir many passions, and it seems more sorrowing than angry. Romero was a good man, he did what his heart told him to do and he died for his virtues. It is a story told every day in Latin America.

My own sensibility of this Holy Man who we celebrate on this March day is not so glib. He sought God in Christ in his quiet, introspective way and found himself transformed by the plight of the poor. This enormous change of heart and his integrity of action for this conservative cleric of the Roman Catholic Church demonstrated his love of God and his willingness to die for God and his Church:

"As a Christian," he remarked, "I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran people."

The martyr as reflected as statement in our Gospel reading today is one who has followed Christ. The cross is his, Oscar Romero's, reward. It was the Priest Oscar Romero who lived the cross long before he became a martyred Christian. He wrote as a young man some prophetic words about his way of life when he was a seminarian in Rome, and that he published there in the students' magazine of the Latin American College. He did this in March of 1940, when he was twenty-two years old. He writes of the priesthood as a sharing in the cross and resurrection of Christ:

This is your heritage, O, priest: the cross. And this is your mission: to portion out the cross. Bearer of pardon and peace, the priest runs to the bed of the dying, and a cross in his hand is the key that opens the heavens and closes the abyss.
The priesthood, Romero said, means "to be, with Christ, a crucified one who redeems, and to be, with Christ, a risen one who apportions resurrection and life.

Regarding another Gospel selection for this special day, [John 12:23-32], Christ was crucified on the cross and though he prayed to prevail in the earthly life, to avoid death and the cross, it was His to bear. So it was this way for Oscar Romero, the quiet Archbishop who in his lifetime gave sermons over the radio. The selected Gospel says:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

It is that God raises up men to do justice and do right, to transform the world as Oscar Romero did in El Salvador and inspire the world, displaying the plight of the poor in his land. As one writer explains it, **Does Romero's life have lessons for us? Perhaps the most important is that God still works wonders with weak and imperfect human beings like us. He brings about his salvation with weak human instruments: David the shepherd boy, Moses the stutterer, Mary the handmaid of Nazareth, Peter the headstrong fisherman, Paul the headstrong Pharisee, and Oscar Romero, the obsessive-compulsive perfectionist, the scrupulous but docile man who only wanted to do what God asked of him.**

Here is an example of Oscar Romero's preaching and the martyr's concern. We get an historical look at the man's true conviction regarding the poor. This example shows how he was explicit, as he had been in his reports to the Pope of the way the poor and downtrodden were treated in El Salvador. In this famous pastoral letter released in November 1976, he reflects on the plight of the thousands of coffee plantation workers in his diocese:

“The Church must cry out by command of God: ‘God has meant the earth and all it contains for the use of the whole human race. Created wealth should reach all in just form, under the aegis of justice and accompanied by charity...’ It saddens and concerns us to see the selfishness with which means and dispositions are found to nullify the just wage of the harvesters. How we would wish that the joy of this rain of rubies and all the harvests of the earth would not be darkened by the tragic sentence of the Bible: ‘Behold, the day wage of laborers that cut your fields defrauded by you is crying out, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord’ [James 5:4]”

Shall we honor this man with a Psalm from our reading today? Yes, let us do that as end to this homily.

Before we end this homily, remember, the Archbishop was gunned down while performing a funeral mass in the Chapel of Divine Providence Hospital. He had said recently, before his assassination:

“Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ will live like the grain of wheat that dies... 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.”

Here is an excerpt from Psalm 31, and it explains by considering Oscar Romero’s life and death how God finds a way to save our life though we may give and lose our lives. This is the way of the Cross:

**Make your face to shine upon your servant, *
and in your loving-kindness save me."**

**LORD, let me not be ashamed for having called upon you; *
rather, let the wicked be put to shame;
let them be silent in the grave.**

**Let the lying lips be silenced which speak against the righteous, *
haughtily, disdainfully, and with contempt.**

**How great is your goodness, O LORD!
which you have laid up for those who fear you; *
which you have done in the sight of all
for those who put their trust in you.**

Amen.