

Oscar Romero Remembered on Centenary of His Birth



San Salvador, August 15 (RHC)-- One hundred years after his birth, the life of Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, "The Voice of the Voiceless" as he became known, is being celebrated around the world.

Cardinal Ricardo Ezzati, special envoy of Pope Francis to El Salvador, is celebrating a special mass in his honor on Tuesday. Thousands of others are marking the occasion in dozens of other countries.

The Salvadoran Archbishop's assassination in 1980 sent global shockwaves, but his killers have never been brought to justice. The case was recently reopened by Judge Rigoberto Chicas, on May 18, in the wake of the Salvadoran Supreme Court's revoking of an amnesty law.

Romero was beatified in 2015, the last stage before canonization. Millions of Catholics continue to revere his teachings, his beliefs and above all his example.

"At the international level, Monsignor Romero is the most respected, best known and most beloved person in El Salvador," said Carlos Vaquerano, executive director of the Salvadoran Leadership Education Fund.

Born in 1917 to Santos Romero and Guadalupe de Jesus Galdamez in Ciudad Barrios in the San Miguel

department of El Salvador, Oscar Romero was baptized into the Catholic Church by Father Cecilio Morales.

Romero began to train as a carpenter, where he showed proficiency as an apprentice. But he opted to enter the Church instead. Romero entered the minor seminary in San Miguel at the age of 13.

After graduation, he enrolled in the national seminary in San Salvador. He completed his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, where he received a Licentiate in Theology cum laude in 1941, but had to wait a year to be ordained because he was younger than the required age. He was ordained in Rome on April 4, 1942.

He embraced a simple lifestyle; he was a popular preacher who responded with real compassion to the plight of the poor. He gave dedicated pastoral service to the diocese of San Miguel for 25 years.

There followed seven years of what he called "pastoral famine," while he served as an ecclesiastical bureaucrat in the capital city, San Salvador.

Ordained Auxiliary Bishop in 1970, he gained a reputation as a stubborn and reactionary prelate.

Seemingly unsympathetic to the new social justice thrust of the Latin American Church, he was suspicious of the clergy and the Base Christian Communities of the archdiocese working alongside the exploited rural poor, promoting social organizations and land reform.

But within three weeks of being appointed Archbishop of San Salvador in February 1977, Romero's stance changed. His friend and priest, Rutilio Grande, was murdered along with two parishioners. Grande had been working with the campesinos to promote cooperatives. Romero drove to the community of Paisnal to view the bodies and meet the peasants who were facing mounting repression. From that day on, Archbishop Romero became a staunch critic of the military government, blaming it for the killing, kidnapping and arresting of priests, campesinos and activists who were organizing peasants and supporting workers' rights.

Violence and murder were claiming the lives of 3,000 people each month. In the words of one witness: "The streets were flooded with blood." The organizations that would soon form the Farabundo Marti Liberation Front, FMLN, were organizing resistance.

A brief spell back in the countryside as Bishop of Santiago de Maria further opened Romero's eyes as he reconnected to the semi-feudal misery and hardship of the campesinos and witnessed the murderous repression being suffered at the hands of the security forces.

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