



NEW SCANDINAVIA LUTHERAN CHURCH MARCH NEWSLETTER 2025

"The Church, the defender of the rights of God, of the law of God, of the dignity of the human person, cannot remain silent before so much abomination. We want the government seriously to consider that reforms mean nothing when they come bathed in so much blood. Therefore, in the name of God, and in the name of this long-suffering people, whose laments rise to heaven every day more tumultuous, I beseech you, I beg you, I command you in the name of God: 'Stop the repression!'"

Archbishop Oscar Romero (1917-1980)

I do not remember when the Salvadoran bishop, Oscar Romero, was assassinated, but why would I? I was young. I lived in the United States. I was not Roman Catholic. Who knows? But things that came about after Romero's death I remember well. I remember seeing Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North in front of members of congress during the Iran-Contra Hearings in 1987 as I began to learn more about what was happening in this Central American country. As a young adult, I struggled to figure out who was "right" and who was "wrong" but even then, I did not hear about the people caught in the middle. I had not heard about the people using their voice to try and make a change or the deaths of people within the religious community that were trying to help those who needed help the most.

It wasn't until a college class called "Christian Mystics and Martyrs" that I began to learn more about what was going on in El Salvadore in those deadly years. I learned about the Maryknoll nuns who were brutally murdered, then buried in a shallow grave on December 2nd, 1980. What did they do wrong? They loved and walked with the poor and tried to use their voices to bring attention to what was happening as part of their ministry. But it was the story of Archbishop Oscar Romero that stayed with me and one that the Church commemorates on the 24th of March.

Oscar Romero grew up in a very modest family. He attended public school, finishing the third grade as was the highest level of education public schools would offer but he went on to be tutored until about 12 or 13 years of age. His father wanted Oscar to work in the trade field, but Oscar felt called to ministry, which did not surprise those around him.

He was studying for his doctorate degree in Rome when in 1943, the church in El Salvador called him back to minister to the people in the rural communities. As he grew in his pastoral role, people began to see his power and influence. In fact, the progressive priests in El Salvadore were leery of Romaro because of his conservative beliefs and his relationships with upper-class families. But his passion for the poor seems to come out of his mother's death and

while the aristocracy came to her funeral, so did those from his humble upbringing and on the way to the cemetery, he was found to be walking alongside those in simple clothing, and not the upper crust and was heard saying "I was born with them. I'll go with them."

Romero began to see what was going on around him, and when those in ministry began to disappear or be found dead, he knew his call was to something more. He became Archbishop in 1977, and he used his weekly radio homily to spread the word of God but to also call out those who were central to the atrocities happening to rural, poor farm families, and that meant calling out the government. Romero knew that this would draw attention to him and that he too would probably find himself at the end of a gun barrel as was happening to others in ministry who were speaking out on behalf of the poor.

In an interview with a journalist shortly before his death he said: *"You can tell people, if they succeed in killing me, that I forgive and bless those who do it. Hopefully, they will realize that they are wasting their time. A bishop will die, but the Church of God, which is the people, will never perish."*

On March 24, 1980, Oscar Romero was assassinated while presiding over communion in the chapel at a hospice facility for cancer patients. *"Whoever offers their life out of love for Christ, and in service to others, will live like the seed that dies... May this immolated body and this blood sacrificed for all nourish us so that we may offer our body and our blood as Christ did, and thus bring justice and peace to our people. Let us join together, then, in the faith and hope of this intimate moment of prayer."* With those words, Oscar Romero fell to the ground, mortally wounded in the heart by a single bullet from an assassin's gun that pierced his heart as he lifted up the cup of wine in the offertory of the Mass.

History has a way of forgetting things, especially if we are not part of their story. Following Archbishop Romero's death, the United States public's reaction was symbolized through the "martyrdom of Romero" as an inspiration to end US military aid to El Salvador. Americans began to hear about the American weapons ending up as part of El Salvador's government but not much was said about the innocent blood shed by those stuck in the middle of El Salvador's civil war- the common people who were just trying to live and work in the place they loved so much. In a side note, between 30 and 50 people are believed to have died at Bishop Romero's funeral; a result of the government trying to break up the gathering. In the end, one thing is for sure, not only should the story of the people of El Salvadore and Bishop Romero (and all the other religious leaders who were assassinated) not be forgotten, but this story, and all the stories of people standing up for the marginalized need to be shared so that this doesn't happen again.

On this March 24, I invite you to lift up a prayer for the poor, the marginalized, people stuck in the middle of situations beyond their control. I invite you to lift up a prayer for leaders in the church who are called to speak Christ's words of caring for those whose voices are ignored. I invite you to lift up in prayer all of those who have died in service to God. And on this March 24, please join me in giving thanks for people like Oscar Romero, the Maryknoll nuns, and all others who are willing to put their lives on the line to stand up for God's call to love all people and work for justice and peace around the world.

God's peace be with you.
Pastor Sara