

## Remembering the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Michael Czerny SJ

**D**ear friends and companions from UCA, IDHUCA and Radio YSUCA:

The peace of Christ and special greetings of solidarity from Africa, which is suffering but always at your side!

On this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Celina, Julia Elba and our six Jesuit companions, I will be remembering them in talks in a number of cities in northern Italy. I would like to share with you three quotes where the Holy Father has spoken about Archbishop Romero:

*(Angelus, 25 March 2007):*

Mary's reply to the Angel is extended in the Church, which is called to make Christ present in history, offering her own availability so that God may continue to visit humanity with his mercy. The "yes" of Jesus and Mary is thus renewed in the "yes" of the saints, especially martyrs who are killed because of the Gospel. I stress this because yesterday, 24 March, the anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero of San Salvador, we celebrated the Day of Prayer and Fasting for Missionary Martyrs, Bishops, priests, Religious and lay people struck down while carrying out their mission of evangelisation and human promotion. These missionary martyrs, as this year's theme says, are the "hope of the world", because they bear witness that Christ's love is stronger than violence and hatred. They did not seek martyrdom, but they were ready to give their lives in order to remain faithful to the Gospel. Christian martyrdom is only justified when it is a supreme act of love for God and our brethren.

*(Interview on the flight to Brazil, 5 September 2007):*

Question: "Your Holiness, we are flying to the continent of Archbishop Oscar Romero. Much has been said about the process of his canonisation. Would you be so kind as to tell us what stage the process is at and whether he will soon be canonised? Also, please tell us something about how you view him.

Response: According to the latest reports on the work of the Congregation dealing with the matter, many cases are being studied and are moving ahead. His Excellency, Archbishop Paglia, sent me an important biography, one that clears up many of the points in question. Archbishop Romero was certainly a great witness to the faith and a man of great Christian virtue; he committed himself to the cause of peace and opposed the dictatorship, and he was killed while celebrating Mass. His death, therefore, is truly "credible" in the way it witnesses to the faith. The problem has been with a political faction which sought unfairly to use him as their banner, as an emblematic figure.

Question: How is it possible to give a true presentation of Romero's stature, while protecting him from such attempts at manipulation?

Response: That is the problem, and it is being looked into. I await with confidence what the Congregation for the cause of saints has to say in that regard.

*(Salvadoran bishops' ad limina visit, 28 February 2008):*

The majority of the Salvadorans are known to be people of strong faith and profound religious sentiment. The Gospel, carried there by the first missionaries and preached with fervour by pastors infused with love of God, like Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero, has taken firm root in that beautiful land and has produced abundant fruits of Christian life and holiness. Once again, dear Brother Bishops, we have seen the transformative power of the message of salvation, which the Church is called to announce, because most certainly, "the Word of God is not kept in chains" (2 Tm 2,9); it is alive and active (cf. Hb 4,12).

These three fragments can do much to help our meditation on this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of our companions (November 1989), and on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Archbishop Romero (March 1980), to be celebrated soon.

In a communion of solidarity with all of you, I pray that the Lord energise us so that we are able to confront the great challenges of these difficult times and wage our struggle with great faith and hope.

As always, in Christ, Michael

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Michael Czerny SJ  
Nairobi – Kenya

*Original Spanish*  
*Translation by Joseph Owens SJ*