

English

Ecumenical Appeal for 1 May 2011: **“Commemorate the ‘canonization’ of the Martyr Oscar Romero by the poor people of this earth”**

Dear Sisters and Brothers throughout the world,

In this appeal we are asking you to commemorate on 1 May 2011 the ‘canonization’ of the Martyr Oscar Romero by the poor of Latin America and by the friends of Jesus in the whole world. This appeal should encourage us on the way of the Gospel, and at the same time be heard as a call for an about-turn in the churches of the wealthy.

Very quickly after his appointment as Archbishop of San Salvador, the conservative pastor Oscar Arnulfo Romero was confronted in 1977 with the bloody persecution of Christians. The tears by the coffins of murdered catechists, altar servers and priests turned him into a courageous Bishop on the side of the little people, the oppressed and the persecuted. From that time on he had the regime in his country, the Security Adviser of the President of the US and powerful Cardinals of the Roman Curia against him.

In the spring of 1979, Bishop Romero found neither an open ear nor support from Pope John Paul II in his plight. Deeply disappointed, he said: *“I believe I will never again come to Rome. The Pope does not understand me.”* John Paul II had taken no notice at all of the photograph of a native priest who had recently been murdered, nor of other documents showing the persecution of Christians by the rich people’s henchmen, but instead merely urged harmony with the Salvadorian government.

Fully aware of his own danger, San Romero de América raised his voice against injustice, excommunicated politicians of the regime, and reminded the resistance of the non-violence of Jesus of Nazareth. After one of the countless murders of Christians he preached: *“Let vengeance be far from us, let us pray with Jesus: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”*

Since every human being is a child and living image of God, worship was for San Oscar Romero indivisibly bound up with the fearless defence of human dignity. His words to the contract killers and henchmen of the junta were unambiguous: *“He who tortures is also a murderer ... No one may raise their hand against another person, for every human being is an image of God.”* One day before his own murder on 24 March 1980 he called on the soldiers publicly to refuse to obey their orders: *“In the name of God and in the name of this tortured people I beg you, I command you: Stop the oppression!”* The bullet of a contract killer hit him during the celebration of the Eucharist at the altar.

The people’s own ‘canonization’ of San Oscar Romero is no act of presumption. We know that only God can look into the heart of a man or woman, and that it is only possible in a fragmentary way to learn to see anew with God’s eyes. But through this “beatification” without any expensive process by the Church authorities the Holy Spirit, which blows where it will, sends a message of good news: *“The example of our brother San Oscar Romero shows us how beautiful and how brave we humans can become, when we begin to listen to the message of Jesus.”*

[translation: Robert Dimmick, Reading - England (Anglican & Area Minister for Berkshire, Third Order of the Society of St Francis)]