

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to thank our pastor, Father Tom, for giving me the opportunity to address you in this occasion. It is an immense honor to be able to write some lines in our Sunday bulletin and thus reach all our parishioners, who make up our great family of St. Pius and so many brothers and sisters who follow us from other places.

We are celebrating the third Sunday of Lent and we are almost halfway through this preparation time. As we continue our pilgrimage to Easter, the call to conversion that the liturgy of the Church makes us during this time is intensified. It is now a good moment to reconsider and see how the fruits of our conversion are going, because we must respond to the Lord's call with a brave and generous heart. In fact, this third Sunday of Lent can be called "the Sunday of conversion", because in the readings, the Lord asks us directly to convert, and not live dominated by an environment that takes us away from peace, love, solidarity and the hope that the Lord wants to instill in our hearts. We know that He helps us and has patience with us, like the vineyard with the fig tree. As the psalmist proclaims, His mercy is infinite, but we cannot abuse it, because God is merciful to us, is just as well.

It is a happy coincidence that this third Sunday of Lent coincides with the feast of St. Oscar Arnulfo Romero, bishop and martyr, who is the first citizen of my country, El Salvador, to be elevated to the altars. St. Oscar Romero was canonized on October 14, 2018 in Rome by Pope Francis. This is the first time we can celebrate his liturgical feast in communion with the Universal Church. The people of El Salvador and many people throughout the world who have known his testimony, have kept his memory alive since he was martyred in fidelity to the Gospel exactly 39 years ago. All Christian faithful can find in him a model of fidelity to Jesus Christ and a model of courageous and generous surrender in favor of the poorest.

St. Oscar Romero was the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador from 1977 to 1980. These were hard times for the people of El Salvador, who lived through one of the most difficult stages of their history, in which the repression on the part of the government towards citizens who demanded their rights was the order of the day. The peasants and the poor were oppressed by the wealthy class who refused to pay fair wages and accumulated most of the country's resources. "Monseñor Romero", as the people called him, aware of his mission as a pastor, and in fidelity to the Gospel and to the teachings of the Church, carried out a courageous prophetic ministry announcing to the people a message of hope, and denouncing the injustices and violations of human rights committed by all the belligerent parties in that political and social conflict, thus becoming "the voice of the voiceless".

Consequently, like Jesus and the prophets of the Bible and of all times, he was hated and slandered by those to whom he denounced their sins and their injustices, and who finally murdered him in the evening of March 24, 1980 while he celebrated the Eucharist in the chapel of a cancer hospital.

Like him, many priests, religious men and women and lay faithful in El Salvador gave their lives and shed their blood in fidelity to Christ and the Gospel, in that political conjuncture, which led to a violent persecution against the Church of El Salvador.

After a thorough study carried out by the Congregation for the Causes of Saints and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Pope Francis authorized his beatification, which took place in San Salvador on May 23, 2015. In the solemn Apostolic Letter in which his beatification is proclaimed, Pope Francis described Monseñor Romero as: "a pastor according to the heart of Christ, evangelizer and father of the poor, heroic witness of the Kingdom of God, reign of justice, fraternity and peace".

Many saints in the history of the Church have been canonized for being faithful to Jesus Christ and the Church and have manifested that fidelity in the practice of works of mercy. But few, or perhaps none have been canonized for having committed themselves to the defense of the rights and dignity of the people, that is, to the practice of social justice. St. Oscar Romero excels in both fields, not only in his brave prophetic ministry in the last three years of his life, but his entire life was generous to God in the selfless service to the poorest, through the practice of works of mercy. Today we can find in him a model to achieve holiness through the commitment to make this world a more fraternal, supportive and just place in which everyone, including the poorest, have a dignified life with their rights and dignity respected.

St. Oscar Arnulfo Romero pray for us!

Fr. Edgardo Rodriguez, Parochial Vicar