

Oscar Romero

Last Friday the Church commemorated Oscar Romero who was martyred in 1980. This year is also the centenary of his birth in 1917. Last Friday our thoughts were quite rightly focussed on the events in Westminster two days previously, so it would be good to think today about Oscar Romero.

Oscar Romero was born in a small village in El Salvador. He was ordained priest and was known as a quiet and unassuming pastor. By 1977 his country was suffering much political and social turmoil, and he was seen to be a good neutral choice to become its Archbishop – someone who would not rock the boat. However, with great courage he spoke out against violence and for the demands of the poor for economic and social justice. He refused to be silenced, even though he was threatened with assassination. On 24th March 1980 he was indeed killed by a gunman while presiding at Mass.

Oscar Romero was declared a martyr by Pope Francis on 3rd February 2015 and was beatified a few months later on 23rd May 2015. He clearly lived up to those words of our Lord we heard in our Bible reading just now (John 15.18-21): “Because you do not belong to the world ... the world hates you”.

Of course the poor for whom he stood up loved him, and indeed more than 250 thousand people from all over the world attended his funeral. However, those who saw him as a threat to their power and vested interests hated him. He is rightly honoured not only by Roman Catholics but by Anglicans. Indeed he is one of the ten 20th century martyrs depicted in statues above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey.

Archbishop Oscar Romero's legacy is a significant one. In 2010, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 24th March as the International Day for the Right to the Truth concerning Gross Human Rights Violations and for the Dignity of Victims which recognizes, in particular, the important work and values of Archbishop Romero.

We are fortunate that we do not face such extreme challenges in our lives. And yet as Christians we are called to witness to justice, peace and reconciliation in our own attitudes, relationships and encounters. And so it is important to remember courageous and faithful people like Oscar Romero and their witness to truth and justice, their commitment to the Gospel message given by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

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