This Sunday we remember Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of El Salvador, who was martyred on March 24, 1980, for speaking out against the repression of the poor.

Romero did not start off as a champion of the rights of the poor. When he was named Archbishop in 1977 at the age of 59, the social justice activists in the church prepared for the worst. Romero had a reputation for clashing with leaders of the emerging social movement in Latin American churches demanding that social structures better reflect gospel values.

However, he had a passion for being with the people and an open heart to listen and learn from them. Sister Eva Menjivar recalled how he never refused an invitation to visit one of the far-flung rural communities she ministered in.

She remembers one visit in which the community staged a play for him based on the gospel parables and then shared their reflections on their significance. When they asked him what his perspective was, he replied,

“I have nothing to add. I’ve learned more about the Bible today than I did when I studied it in the seminary in Rome.” *

Later, Romero would say, “Looking at Rutilio lying there dead I thought, ‘If they killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.’” *

“In the funeral Mass we held for him at the UCA (Central American University), Ignacio Ellacuria said, ‘In Archbishop Romero, God passed through El Salvador.’ The people spontaneously proclaimed him a saint.” **

As he continued to listen to people’s stories of hardship and persecution in a country where 40% of the land was owned by 14 families, his stance slowly began to change.

A turning point in Romero’s ministry was the assassination of his close friend, Rutilio Grande, a Jesuit priest who was outspoken against injustice.

In 1980, Romero was shot to death while celebrating Mass in a small hospital chapel. The day before, he had preached a sermon demanding that Salvadoran soldiers stop participating in repressive activities.

Liberation theologian Jon Sobrino S.J. recalls, “In the funeral Mass we held for him at the UCA (Central American University), Ignacio Ellacuria said, ‘In Archbishop Romero, God passed through El Salvador.’ The people spontaneously proclaimed him a saint.” **

“God Passed Through El Salvador”

Prayer for the Feast of Saint Romero

Almighty God, you called your servant Oscar Romero to be a voice for the voiceless poor, and to give his life as a seed of freedom and a sign of hope. Grant that, inspired by his sacrifice and the example of the martyrs of El Salvador, we may, without fear or favor, witness to your Word who abides, your Word who is Life, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be praise and glory now and forever. Amen


* Palumbo, G. Remembering Romero: God Passed Through El Salvador. Published in ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America