

## **HOLY THURSDAY, 2010**

On March 24, 1980, in El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero was offering Mass in the chapel of the cancer hospital where he lived. As he was lifting up the chalice at the Consecration, several members of right-wing death squad walked into the chapel and shot Archbishop Romero in the heart, killing him. The movies “Romero” (1989) and “Salvador” (1986) portray quite accurately this story.

Oscar Romero was an unlikely martyr. He was a quiet, studious young man. He studied in Rome, and when he returned to El Salvador, he was considered by those in power a “safe” priest. He would not rock the boat nor challenge the status quo. In 1976, he was made a bishop of a poor diocese. Most of his own priests did not trust him; he was too conservative. Yet, this shy, humble man began to see the real suffering of the poor. He saw how those in power – government, banks, foreign corporations, military, and, yes, the Church – worked to keep the poor poor! He began to speak out for justice.

The more he spoke out, the more those who had once lauded him now came to hate him, a hatred borne out of fear. Yet, as Romero began to stand up to the “principalities and powers”, the more the people of El Salvador saw him as an authentic messenger of the Gospel! However, the leaders of El Salvador, like the Roman officials and High priests of Jesus’ time, could not allow this man and his message to continue.

Roberto D’Aubisson was a high ranking official in the ruling party of El Salvador. He had been trained by the American Army at their “School of Americas” in Georgia. D’Aubisson and his right-wing militia (fully supported by the government) had been armed with the best American weapons. He ordered the killing and had no doubt that his people could kill Romero and nothing would happen to them. D’Aubisson lived many more years, only to die of cancer.

Archbishop Romero lived and died believing in the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. He certainly believed in the power of Christ’s Body and Blood, shared every time we celebrate the Mass. It is ironic that he was killed celebrating Mass. Yet, his belief in what was important is summarized so well in the following statement he made shortly before he died: “I do not believe in death without Resurrection. If I am killed, then I will be raised up in the lives of the Salvadoran people.”

The long history of Christianity is the story of those whose bodies and blood were sacrificed because of their faith. The first Apostles, Stephen the Deacon, the martyrs of Rome. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, for speaking out against Facism and its culture of death. Maximilian Kolbe offering to replace a person condemned to die in the concentration camp. Oscar Romero for siding with the poor against the rich and powerful. Sr. Luzia Kautidia assassinated in Mongwa while helping transport someone to the hospital. The eight Trappists murdered in Algeria for their witness to peace and reconciliation. The thousands of priests, Religious, lay leaders and Catechists slain over the years by those who chose the darkness rather than the light.

On the first night of Passover, the first and most important question asked at the family table is, “Why is this night different from every other night?” For us who believe in the Lord Jesus, the answer is simple. In the gift of His Body and Blood, broken and poured out for us, we have life, life eternal. For this, we can only bow before His Presence in the Eucharist and murmur a most humble, “Thank you”.

Reverend Joseph A. Mulcrone, April 1, 2010