



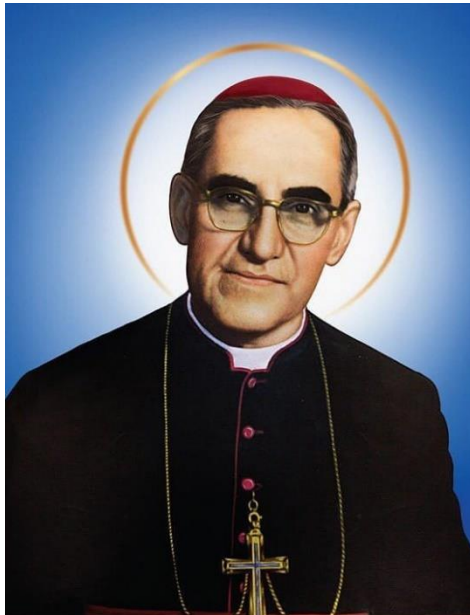
Basilian Fathers

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Saint Oscar Romero

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The official addition of Óscar Arnulfo Romero y Galdámez (1917-1980) to the roll of Basilian patron saints may be recent, dating back only to the 2018 General Chapter. But our Congregation's devotion to St. Óscar Romero and imitation of his example of nonviolent social justice goes back much farther in our Basilian history. My first teaching appointment as a Basilian was to Cali, Colombia. There, I quickly discerned the due reverence our confrères and the people among whom we serve have for Romero.

Óscar Romero is a saint and martyr of the Church of San Salvador; of the people of El Salvador. Just days before his death while pronouncing the words of institution of the Eucharist at Mass, Archbishop Romero had been interviewed by the Mexican magazine *Excelsior*. He said:

I need to say that as a Christian I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise again in the people of El Salvador... May my death, if it is accepted by God, be for the liberation of my people, as a witness of hope in what is to come. You can tell them that if they succeed in killing me, I pardon and bless those who do it. A bishop may die, but the Church of God, which is in the people, will never die.

Archbishop Romero was a master of the use of radio and other media of social communication; his homilies were widely broadcast in El Salvador. To his last homily and with the witness of his life, St. Óscar Romero stood for the dignity of the poorest of the Salvadoran people. He stood for nonviolence. He did not align neatly with any partisan political ideology.

Romero, an auxiliary bishop of San Salvador, had been appointed Archbishop of that see on February 3, 1977. He was viewed as a safe candidate as Archbishop of San Salvador, who would not inflame the tenuous sociopolitical situation in El Salvador or divide the Salvadoran Church, especially on issues of land and economic reforms to benefit the country's poorest. The assassination of Romero's friend and advocate for social justice, the recently-beatified Fr. Rutilio Grande, SJ, on March 12, 1977, reportedly strengthened Romero's voice for the social justice for which Fr. Grande advocated and also gave his life. But Romero's commitment to the spirituality of the interior life, coupled with his outward commitment to the dignity of the poorest and nonviolence, long preceded Bl. Rutilio Grande's death.

In his last Sunday homily, March 23, 1980, St. Óscar Romero pleaded with all sides to lay down their arms: You are killing your own brother and sister *campesinos*, and against any order a person may give to kill, God's law must prevail: 'You shall not kill (Ex 20:13)! No soldier is obliged to obey an order against the law of God.'

The next day, Óscar Romero was killed by the very people he implored to uphold God's law. He is a saint and martyr of the local Church of San Salvador; of El Salvador. Yet he is a saint and martyr of the universal Church; a teacher and witness to us as Basilians of the goodness, discipline, and knowledge that manifest as a preferential commitment to the least of our sisters and brothers, and a choice for the intrinsic dignity of human life over any form of violence.