

## **20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF ASSASSINATION OF JESUIT MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR**

### **VIGIL MASS FOR MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR**

**SATURDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009**

It is indeed a privilege being here with you this evening as we celebrate this Vigil Mass for the Martyrs of El Salvador.

My links with El Salvador have extended over all of the years of my episcopacy in Scotland – that small country with roughly the same population, about 5 million people, as El Salvador itself. Archbishop Oscar Romero himself was assassinated on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1980 the year I began my last appointment prior to my appointment as Archbishop in 1985. His inspiration has stayed with me throughout the past almost 25 years of my episcopacy – and we now look forward to commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death next year. He has been an inspiration to Bishops all over the world in the ways in which he served his people, especially the poor.

Some ten years after the assassination of Archbishop Romero the six Jesuit members of staff of the University of Central America (UCA) were assassinated in the early hours of 16<sup>th</sup> November 1989 along with the wife, Julia Elba, of a caretaker at the UCA and their daughter Celina. Consequently it was only four years into my own episcopacy when these assassinations took place – shocking the whole world while reminding me of my own increased call to service. BUT they must also be an inspiration to priests and people all over the world.

Over the years of my episcopacy I have been in El Salvador on three occasions – following a lead of various priests of my Archdiocese who have volunteered for service in this beautiful yet troubled land. On this present visit, some few days ago, my first encounters were not with the President of the Republic, nor with the Bishops – but rather with a visit to the suffering peoples of the San Vicente areas recently devastated by Hurricane Ida. Again, I was horrified at what I witnessed so recently after that disaster, particularly in the areas of St Isidore, Vera Paz and Guadalupe – and again called to mind those words of Archbishop Romero with regard to the sufferings of the poor and less able.

In coming here for these commemorative events on these days I would like to think that I represent a great cloud of witnesses in our Church who in some way or another look to the lives and the deaths of the Martyrs of El Salvador – that other great cloud of witnesses – who by their ways of lives and the deaths which they endured are still inspiring those who basically want our Church to walk with the poor, to denounce injustice and to be a beacon of hope for a new future.

On this occasion I also ask you to think of the words of both Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and along with those recent words of your own President, Mauricio Funes.

In his letter “On the Coming of the Third Millennium” of 1994 the late Pope John Paul II called on all of us to be aware of the place of martyrs and their example. He wrote then: “The Church has once again become a Church of martyrs”. You are aware of that in your own suffering people!

And when Pope Benedict XVI travelled to Latin America in early 2007 on the first time as Pope to open the Fifth General Assembly of the Council of Bishops in Latin America (CELAM) Brazil he stated in his words during an interview: “Archbishop Romero was certainly an important witness of

the faith, a man of great Christian virtue who worked for peace and against the dictatorship, and was killed while celebrating Mass. Consequently, his death was truly “credible”, a witness of faith”.

And in a few days time your President, Mauricio Funes will grant posthumous awards of the National Order ‘Jose Matias Delgado’ in the grade of Grand Cross with Gold Star, to six Jesuit martyrs whom we commemorate at this time. I know that this acknowledgement will bring great pleasure to all who are in any way associated with the Jesuits and with this University of Central America.

It is to join in your commemorations here in El Salvador to witness to the faith of Archbishop Romero and that of the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America with their domestic staff that I have travelled to be with you.

The deaths of such people do challenge each one of us in our way of life. If those deaths are to have value in our world – we too, each one of us in our own countries, must make sure we walk with the poor; we too denounce injustice wherever we find it; and we too must be beacons of hope in our own countries. We call to mind that we have an exalted vocation by virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism and we must fulfil our vocation wherever we are in whatever possible way.