

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

### **MASS AT UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL AMERICA IN MEMORY OF THE MARTYRS**

**MONDAY 16<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2009**

It is a privilege being here with you here in the University of Central America (UCA) celebrating Mass so near the place of the brutal assassinations some 20 years ago of the six Jesuit priests and their two domestic helpers. Our thoughts go back to them and to those who mourn their deaths.

Also on this occasion I take the opportunity of thanking the Jesuit priests who have remained behind in UCA – as well as those 100 priests who immediately volunteered to take the place of their six assassinated brothers. Their example is an outstanding one to each one of us.

I also take this opportunity of thanking most sincerely your Constitutional President Mauricio Funes for presiding at that wonderful celebration this morning in the Presidential Palace when the posthumous awards of the National Order ‘Jose Matias Delgado’ with the grade of the Grand Cross with Gold Star was awarded to each of the assassinated Jesuits. This was a fitting tribute from your Head of State – made all the more poignant with the presence of the families of the assassinated Jesuits, as also that beautiful tribute in song by the Compesinos, who had walked for many hours to be with us today.

I also thank Monsignor Gregorio Rosa Chavez, the longest serving member of the Bishops’ Conference of El Salvador, a friend of the late Archbishop Romero, as well as being a friend of the Jesuits. He has served this country and its people faithfully and well in his own unobtrusive way for almost 30 years now as a Bishop and I thank him most sincerely.

In reading over the words of one of the present Jesuit members of staff of UCA we are told that the UCA Martyrs: “Stood for a new kind of university, a new kind of society, a new Church. Together with our late colleagues, they wrestled with the ambiguities of their University in a country where only a tiny minority finished elementary school and still fewer could meet the required academic standards and pay tuition. ....More important, they sought countless ways to unmask the lies that justified the pervasive injustice and the continuing violence; and they made constructive proposals for the just peace and more humane social order”. It was because they were preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ by their lives, by their words, by their actions that they were murdered.

Those Jesuit priests are indeed martyrs of UCA; they are Jesuit martyrs; they are martyrs of Central America. But as a Cardinal from far away, I suggest to you that they are martyrs of the Universal Church and that is why I am here!

May we all continue to be inspired by the examples of Archbishop Romero, those six Jesuit martyrs and their helpers, as well as the four American women who lost their lives and those countless thousands of others who sacrificed their lives in recent years in their country.

May God indeed bless all of us at this present time and make us worthy to follow in their footsteps to ensure that the prophetic Church, as symbolised in the lives and deaths of those whom we are honouring, continues to give credible witness to the fulness of life that God promises.