

20TH ANNIVERSARY OF ASSASSINATION OF JESUIT MARTYRS OF EL SALVADOR

CELEBRATION OF MASS AT ARCHBISHOP ROMERO'S TOMB IN THE CRYPT OF SAN SALVADOR CATHEDRAL

SUNDAY 15TH NOVEMBER 2009

Scotland and El Salvador are very far from one another – but I assure you that El Salvador is at the heart of the thoughts of the people of Scotland and indeed at the heart of the thoughts of the people of the world. You are not alone – but you are recognised as people who fight oppression and the grinding poverty which ensures that you are not really living human lives.

I witnessed this once more when I arrived in El Salvador last Thursday and made an initial visit to San Vicente at the heart of the recent Hurricane Ida. Again it was the poorest of the poor who were suffering the most and trying to face the disastrous consequences of the hurricane in the death of loved ones, the loss of their homes, and basically the loss of all the meagre possessions which they had. Again I witnessed something of the sufferings of the people of El Salvador in being driven here to the Cathedral this morning when I passed through some of the worst slums which I have ever seen in any capital city – this is a sin crying to heaven for vengeance.

It was to fight such poverty and helplessness that Monsignor Romero set his sights and his goal for his time as your Archbishop.

It was Pope Benedict XVI who described him as: “An important witness of the faith, a man of great Christian virtue who worked for peace and against the dictatorship, and was killed whilst celebrating Mass”.

I know that the life and death of Archbishop Romero has inspired countless thousands of people throughout the world. I do not need to give you a history of his life as Priest and Bishop – that will be well known to you all. However it is that life in El Salvador of thirty years ago that has inspired so many people including the Jesuit Martyrs of the University of Central America to follow in his footsteps. He was horrified by the grinding rural poverty in his country as he wrote: “Children dying from curable diseases because their parents could not pay for immunisations or basic medications; people who are paid less than half of the legal minimum wage, if they were paid at all; people who had been savagely beaten for insolence when they asked for long overdue pay”!

As you well know, his fight for the poor continued throughout his life – as shown in his pastoral letters and his actions in defence of the poor. Shining through his life and death were his basic spirituality and his simplicity of life. He was not unaware of what might happen to him – and at his last retreat he wrote: “It is not easy to accept a violent death, which is very possible in these circumstances.... You have encouraged me, reminding me that my attitude should be to hand my life over to God regardless of the end to which that life might come. If it comes to this I shall feel God very close as I draw my last breath”. He did indeed face death and accepted it from our Father in Heaven as probably he would have wanted in the celebration of Mass.

One of his favourite phrases was that: “Even if they kill me I will continue to live on in my people”. I was aware of the strength of those words some years ago when visiting this tomb in his Cathedral. On approaching the tomb an old man approached me and simply said: “Have you come to see

Monsignor". He said those words as if Romero was still alive – as he still was, as he is and as he always will be in the hearts and in the minds of each and every person of El Salvador and every one who still loves El Salvador at this present time.

I now join you all, with Bishops from all over the world, in asking for the speedy beatification and canonisation of Archbishop Romero. We all realise that this is not to give him any glory – we hope he now enjoys the glory of God in Heaven. But rather it will give some glory and tribute to those many other suffering peoples of El Salvador including, of course, the six Jesuit martyrs and their two domestic helpers whose assassination we commemorate at this time.

May Archbishop Romero continue to inspire the peoples of El Salvador in their ongoing struggle to improve their way of life and to battle against crime, corruption and violence of every kind.