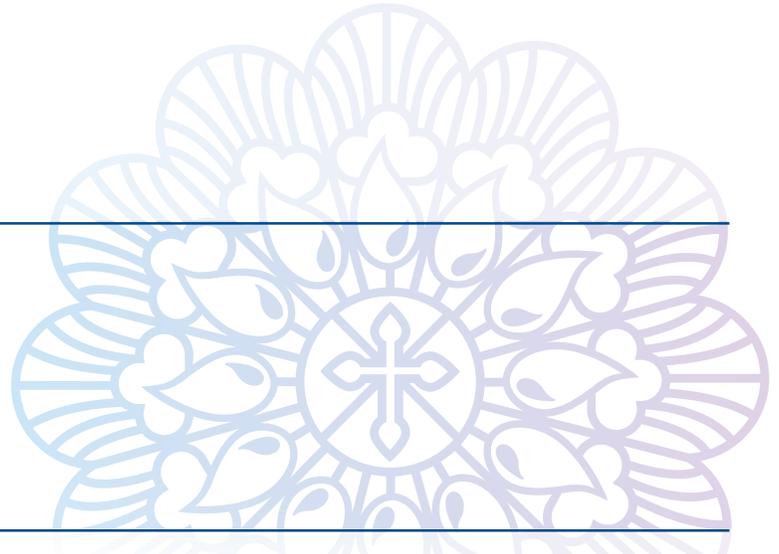
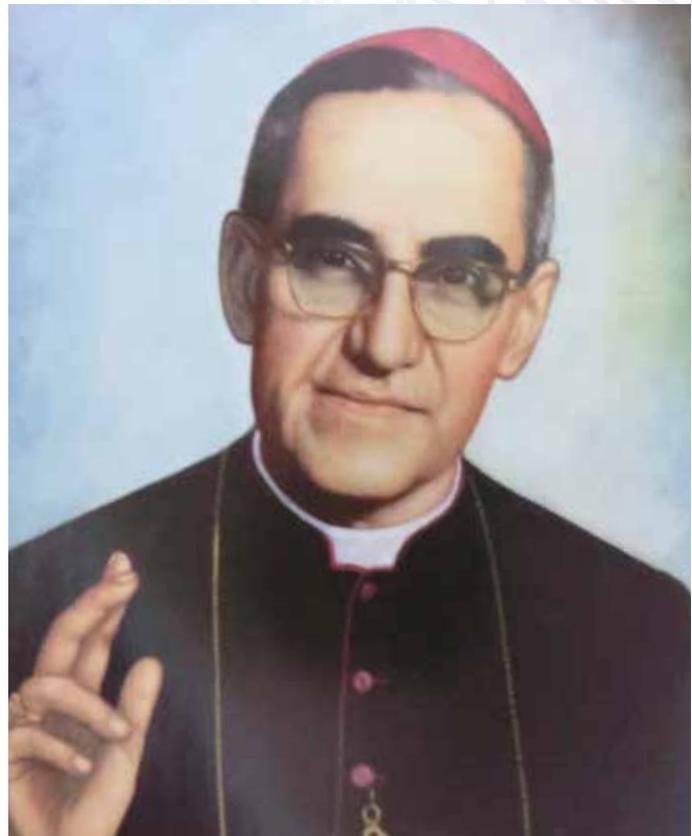

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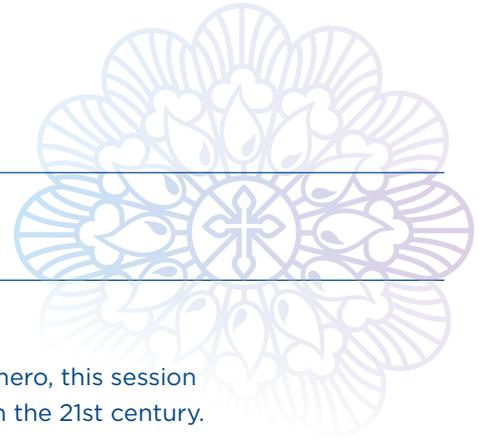


EXPLORING CATHOLIC MARTYRDOM
IN THE 21ST CENTURY THROUGH
THE EXAMPLE OF BLESSED
OSCAR ROMERO



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OBJECTIVE In light of the beatification of Archbishop Oscar Romero, this session invites participants to explore Catholic martyrdom in the 21st century.

- MATERIALS**
- AV equipment and internet access
 - "The Sabor Amigo Challenge," a video from CRS' YouTube channel
 - Newsprint
 - Markers
 - Paper plates
 - Play dough or clay
 - Popsicle or craft sticks
 - Pens
 - Copy of "Blessed Oscar Romero Quotes" handout
 - Items for "Being Church: Speaking Out With the Poor" prayer service:
 - "Being Church: Speaking Out With the Poor" prayer service for leader and readers
 - Basket
 - Bible opened to Luke 4:16–21
 - Items for prayer space: candle, crucifix, world map, image of Blessed Oscar Romero, etc.
 - Music for "The Cry of the Poor" (John Foley, SJ, Spirit & Song)
 - Reflective music and player/speakers
 - Optional film:
 - "Romero," Paulist Pictures, 1989 (104 minutes)
 - "Monseñor: The Last Journey of Oscar Romero," Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 2012 (88 minutes)

- PREPARATION**
- Put two handfuls of play dough and a handful of popsicle sticks on a paper plate. Create enough plates for groups of 3 to 4.
 - Print the "Blessed Oscar Romero Quotes" handout and cut it into cards—you'll need one card per person. The handout will make 24 cards.
 - Write the following questions on a piece of newsprint:
 - How did Archbishop Romero's words challenge people in power?
 - How can we be witnesses to the faith through our words or actions?
 - How does Archbishop Romero understand Christian discipleship? Do you agree?
 - Make copies of the "Being Church: Speaking Out With the Poor" prayer service. Prepare the prayer space and any items needed for the service.
 - Optional: If you choose to show part or all of a film, set it up ahead of time, adjusting the schedule as needed.

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SESSION OUTLINE

- **focus:**
play by the rules
(20 minutes)
- **to die for:**
the power of discipleship
(15 minutes)
- **Blessed Oscar Romero:**
martyr for the faith
(20 minutes)
- **legacy of Blessed Oscar Romero:**
stories of hope from Salvadoran youth
(20 minutes)
- **closing prayer service:**
“Being Church: Speaking Out With the Poor”
(15 minutes)

Note: This 90-minute session can be used in its entirety, or the activities can be used individually. If you choose to watch all or part of a film about Archbishop Romero, please adapt the session outline as needed.



Photo by Ric Francis for CRS

focus activity

PLAY BY THE RULES (20 minutes)

- Welcome and Invite participants to introduce themselves.
- Divide the group into small groups of 3 to 4 people.
- Number the participants in the group from 1 to 3 (add 4 if necessary).
- Invite number 1s to go to the back of the room.
- Invite number 2s (and 4s) to go to the front of the room.
- Invite number 3s to wait in the hallway until you summon them.
- Instructions for number 1s: Give each of the 1s a paper plate with supplies. Tell them they are the leaders of the group and that their group's task is to build the tallest tower they can. When the activity begins, instruct them to tell the number 2s, 3s and 4s what the task is. Tell them that it's essential that they only work with the number 2s and that they do not allow the number 3s to handle the supplies. Tell them not to talk or listen to the 3s.
- Instructions for number 2s and number 4s: Tell them that the number 1s are their leaders. Explain that their role is to help them and that it is essential that they work only with each other and the leader. Ask them to go to the back of the room and divide themselves up equally among the number 1s.
- Instructions for number 3s: Explain that number 1s are the leaders of each group and will tell each group what to do. Invite each of them to join a different group.
- Instructions for the large group: When all participants have joined their groups, give them 10 minutes to complete the task. Ask the number 1s to begin. Observe what is happening in the groups.
- At the end of the activity, invite the groups to look at the various towers.



Photo courtesy of iStock

- Discuss the activity as a large group:

1. **Ask the excluded participants how they felt during the activity and why.**

Note: Most excluded participants will simply stop participating. Some may try to be included. If any did, ask them why, especially since they weren't welcome.

2. **Ask the other participants: How did you feel during this activity and why?**

Note:

- While participants may think this activity was meant to focus on how the number 3s felt, it is really about the other participants' behavior.
- Some leaders will enjoy having power over the other players. Others may have found the exclusion rule uncomfortable or "wrong" and may not have enforced it.
- Some of the number 2s and 4s may have been forceful about supporting their leader, while others may have been passive or resistant.

3. **Ask: If you followed the rules, why did you do so?**

Note: Ask the group if they always obey authority figures, even if they think they're wrong.

4. **Ask: Did anyone decide not to follow the rules? Why?**

- If no individual or group disregarded the rules, ask why.
- Tell them they could have chosen not to exclude anyone.
- Tell them that saints and martyrs sometimes did things as witnesses of Christ that did not align with society's rules. These holy men and women followed Christ even when it meant alienation, upsetting society—or even their own death.
- Explain that today they'll reflect on the witness of Blessed Oscar Romero, who spoke up in the name of Jesus when people were excluded from society.



Blessed Oscar Romero shared Christ's message of caring for the poor and standing with the oppressed. His actions were deeply rooted in his belief that "My disposition must be to give my life for God, whatever the end of my life may be." This quote is displayed on the banner, above.

Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

to die for

POWER OF DISCIPLESHIP (15 minutes)

- Write the following occupations on a piece of newsprint (leave room at the top for a title):
 - SOLDIER
 - POLICE OFFICER
 - FIREFIGHTER
 - HEALTH CARE WORKER
- Note that all of these jobs are high-risk occupations.
- **Ask: Can you think of any other occupations that should be listed?**
- Write the title "To Die For" on the top of the page.
- **Ask: What ideas or beliefs are people in these occupations willing to die for?**
- Add "CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE" to the list.
- **Ask: What are Christian disciples willing to die for?**
- **Ask: What might be threatening about these disciples?**
- Explain that Christians around the world have been persecuted and even executed for being witnesses to their faith. During the time of the early Church, Christians were perceived as a threat to the Roman Empire because they ignored laws that went against their beliefs (like the requirement to worship Roman gods). They recognized the legitimate authority of the government, but they also recognized its limitations. Even the ultimate threat of death wasn't enough for them to obey laws they believed were immoral.

- Explain that those who follow Jesus Christ have been perceived as a threat to some power structures throughout history.
- Explain that in some countries, those in authority maintain their power by marginalizing certain groups. Marginalized people often follow the dictates of authority figures because they fear imprisonment, fines, loss of a job, rejection or even death.
- Share that those who follow Jesus' teachings by standing with the poor and vulnerable often upset the balance of power.
- Explain that Jesus upset the balance of power during his lifetime. He said things like:
 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:3)
 - “Behold, the kingdom of God is among you.” (Luke 17:21)
 - “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25:40)
 - “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another.” (John 13:34)
 - He also spent time with and healed society's outcasts—like the sick and the lame—even when it upset the Pharisees.
- **Ask:** Can you think of any other examples from the life or teachings of Jesus that may have challenged people in power?
- Explain that holy men and women who call for equality and solidarity shake the foundations of power. Many holy men and women have been persecuted for living a prophetic lifestyle.

“Amen, I say to you,
whatever you did
for one of these
least brothers of mine,
you did for me.”

—Matthew 25:40



Photo courtesy of iStock

blessed Oscar Romero

MARTYR FOR THE FAITH (20 minutes)

- **Ask: Name saints who were martyrs and share what you know about them.**
- Explain that the Catholic Church says “Martyrdom is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2473*)
- Share that people continue be martyred for their Catholic faith.
- Tell participants that the Catholic Church beatified Archbishop Romero on May 23, 2015.
- Share the story of Archbishop Romero:

Archbishop Romero served as Archbishop of the Archdiocese of San Salvador, El Salvador, from 1977 until he was martyred for his faith in 1980.

During that time, political violence, disappearances and human rights violations were widespread. Many priests and nuns spoke out on behalf of the victims, and many were murdered because of it. Blessed Oscar Romero’s friend and fellow priest, Father Rutilio Grande, was killed in 1977. After Father Grande’s murder, Archbishop Romero spoke out even more strongly on behalf of marginalized people. He heard the stories of the poor, and his voice against the violence grew louder and louder.

People in villages across the nation tuned in to Archbishop Romero’s radio homilies, finding strength and comfort in his words. Each week he would denounce the violence and urge people to live out Christ’s Gospel message of peace and love. Archbishop Romero was shot and killed while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980. He was formally declared a martyr by Pope Francis in February 2015.

Optional: Show all or part of a video. See suggestions in the materials section.

- Point out that Catholic martyrs are witnesses to the truth of their faith unto death.
- **Ask: How do you think Archbishop Romero was a witness to the truth of our faith?**
- Explain that Archbishop Romero was a witness to the truth of our faith because he shared Christ’s message of caring for the poor and standing with the oppressed.
- Tell participants that the Church thoroughly researched Archbishop Romero’s life, writings and homilies. Some argued that his death was a political assassination, while others said he died as a martyr for the Catholic faith. In early 2015, theologians in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith concluded unanimously that he was killed because of hatred for his faith.
- Distribute the Blessed Oscar Romero quotes cards.
- Tell participants they will each receive a card with a quote from the sermons or writings of Archbishop Romero. They will have 5 minutes to read their card(s) and silently reflect on them before discussing.
- Post the prepared newsprint with the following questions:
 - How do you think Blessed Oscar Romero’s words challenged people in power?
 - How can we be witnesses to the faith through our words and actions?
 - How does Archbishop Romero understand Christian discipleship?
Do you agree?
- If time permits, invite participants to discuss their answers in small groups or with the large group.



Photo by Oscar Leiva/Silverlight for CRS

Legacy of blessed Oscar Romero

STORIES OF HOPE FROM SALVADORAN YOUTH (20 minutes)

- **Ask: What do you know about El Salvador today?**
- Supplement what they know with the following points:
 - El Salvador experienced a brutal, 12-year civil war that began in 1979 and ended in 1992. El Salvador now has a democratically elected government.
 - Poor communities in El Salvador face a different kind of violence than they did during Archbishop Romero's time.
 - Violence has grown in the past decade as street gangs and drug cartels, many tied to the United States, expand their influence. But the Church continues to stand with the poor.
 - Catholic Relief Services, the official international humanitarian agency of the Catholic community in the United States, works with the Catholic Church in El Salvador to promote peace. CRS helps at-risk youth and their families overcome violence and poverty through life skills, vocational training and job placements. CRS' Youth Builders program has served more than 6,000 young people.
- Share The Sabor Amigo Challenge video clip.
- Invite the group to discuss the following questions:
 - What did Ludvig Rivera, the young man featured in the video, do to try to change his future?
 - What challenges did Ludvig need to overcome before joining the Youth Builders project?
 - As disciples of Christ, how can we support programs like Youth Builders?
 - Conclude by sharing the words of the Archbishop Oscar Romero Prayer, "A Step Along the Way," by Bishop Ken Untener:

"This is what we are about:
 We plant seeds that one day will grow.
 We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.
 We lay foundations that will need further development.
 We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities."
- Explain that Blessed Oscar Romero's legacy lives on in the faith, hope and perseverance of the Salvadoran people. They have much to teach the world about what it means to believe in the message of Jesus—and to live that message with the power of Christ's disciples.
- Invite participants to prayer.

closing prayer service

“BEING CHURCH: SPEAKING OUT WITH THE POOR” (20 minutes)

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Follow the outline in the “Being Church: Speaking Out With the Poor” prayer service



BEING CHURCH: speaking out with the poor

A prayer service inspired by the witness of Blessed Oscar Romero

“A Church that does not join the poor in order to speak out from the side of the poor against the injustices committed against them is not the true Church of Jesus Christ.”

—Blessed Oscar Romero

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By Christina Semmel
Christina J. Semmel, M.R.E., M.P.S., is a national certified youth ministry leader with more than 35 years of parish experience.

Blessed Oscar Romero Quotes

Print these pages and cut out the squares.

Many would like the poor to keep on saying that it is God's will for them to live that way. But it is not God's will for some to have everything and others to have nothing. That cannot be of God. God's will is that all his children be happy.

We must not seek the child Jesus in the pretty figures of our Christmas cribs. We must seek him among the undernourished children who have gone to bed tonight with nothing to eat, among the poor newsboys who will sleep covered with newspapers in doorways.

When we struggle for human rights, for freedom, for dignity, when we feel that it is a ministry of the church to concern itself for those who are hungry, for those who are deprived, we are not departing from God's promise. He comes to free us from sin, and the church knows that sin's consequences are all such injustices and abuses. The church knows it is saving the world when it undertakes to speak also of such things.

The great need today is for Christians who are active and critical, who don't accept situations without analyzing them inwardly and deeply. We no longer want masses of people like those who have been trifled with for so long. We want persons like fruitful fig trees, who can say yes to justice and no to injustice and can make use of the precious gift of life, regardless of the circumstances.

For the church, the many abuses of human life, liberty, and dignity are a heartfelt suffering. The church, entrusted with the earth's glory, believes that in each person is the Creator's image and that everyone who tramples it offends God. As holy defender of God's rights and of his images, the church must cry out ... Whoever tortures a human being, whoever abuses a human being, whoever outrages a human being abuses God's image, and the church takes as its own that cross, that martyrdom.

The church's social teaching tells everyone that the Christian religion does not have a merely horizontal meaning, or a merely spiritualized meaning that overlooks the wretchedness that surrounds it. It is a looking at God, and from God at one's neighbor as a brother or sister, and an awareness that "whatever you did to one of these, you did to me."

Let us be today's Christians. Let us not take fright at the boldness of today's church. With Christ's light let us illuminate even the most hideous caverns of the human person: torture, jail, plunder, want, chronic illness. The oppressed must be saved, not with a revolutionary salvation, in merely human fashion, but with the holy revolution of the Son of Man, who dies on the cross to cleanse God's image, which is soiled in today's humanity, a humanity so enslaved, so selfish, so sinful.

What good are beautiful highways and airports, beautiful buildings full of spacious apartments, if they are only put together with the blood of the poor, who are not going to enjoy them?

Each one of you must be God's microphone, each one of you must be a messenger, a prophet. The church will always exist as long as there is one baptized person. And that one baptized person who is left in the world is responsible before the world for holding aloft the banner of the Lord's truth and of his divine justice.

A religion of Sunday Mass but of unjust weeks does not please the Lord. A religion of much praying but with hypocrisy in the heart is not Christian. A church that sets itself up only to be well off, to have a lot of money and comfort, but that forgets to protest injustices, would not be the true church of our divine Redeemer.

Nothing is so important to the church as human life, as the human person, above all, the person of the poor and the oppressed. Besides being human beings, they are also divine beings, since Jesus said that whatever is done to them he takes as done to him. That bloodshed, those deaths, are beyond all politics. They touch the very heart of God.

We must learn this invitation of Christ: "Those who wish to come after me must renounce themselves." Let them renounce themselves, renounce their comforts, renounce their personal opinions, and follow only the mind of Christ, which can lead us to death but will surely also lead us to resurrection.

The church values human beings and contends for their rights, for their freedom, for their dignity. That is an authentic church endeavor. While human rights are violated, while there are arbitrary arrests, while there are tortures, the church considers itself persecuted, it feels troubled, because the church values human beings and cannot tolerate that an image of God be trampled by persons that become brutalized by trampling on others.

When we struggle for human rights, for freedom, for dignity, when we feel that it is a ministry of the church to concern itself for those who are hungry, for those who are deprived, we are not departing from God's promise.

Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world. Let us not tire of preaching love. Though we see that waves of violence succeed in drowning the fire of Christian love, love must win out; it is the only thing that can.

Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.

Do you want to know if your Christianity is genuine? Here is the touchstone: Whom do you get along with? Who are those who criticize you? Who are those who do not accept you? Who are those who flatter you?

This is the mission entrusted to the church, a hard mission: to uproot sins from history, to uproot sins from the political order, to uproot sins from the economy, to uproot sins wherever they are. What a hard task!

When we preach the Lord's word, we decry not only the injustices of the social order. We decry every sin that is night, that is darkness: drunkenness, gluttony, lust, adultery, abortion, everything that is the reign of iniquity and sin. Let them all disappear from our society.

The world does not say: blessed are the poor. The world says: blessed are the rich. You are worth as much as you have. But Christ says: wrong. Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven, because they do not put their trust in what is so transitory.

We have never preached violence, except the violence of love, which left Christ nailed to a cross, the violence that we must each do to ourselves to overcome our selfishness and such cruel inequalities among us. The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood ...

There is one rule by which to judge if God is near us or is far away—the rule that God's word is giving us today: Everyone concerned for the hungry, the naked, the poor, for those who have vanished in police custody, for the tortured, for prisoners, for all flesh that suffers, has God close at hand.

To be a Christian now means to have the courage to preach the true teaching of Christ and not be afraid of it, not be silent out of fear and preach something easy that won't cause problems.

A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what gospel is that?