

God's presence in the struggle for social justice, human development and freedom from poverty and oppression

Rise & Shine, October 21st

Matthew 10:37-39

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. (For context, read 10:34-42)

Question: It is easy for us to see God's presence in our joy, our family, and our blessings. Should we find a way to struggle for the existence of God's presence by seeking out the pain of others?

In the News

Martyred Archbishop Oscar Romero to Be Canonized 38 Years After His Death

Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, murdered March 24, 1980, while he celebrated Mass, will be made a saint of the Roman Catholic Church at a Vatican ceremony October 14.

A few short weeks after Romer's installation as bishop in 1931, Jesuit priest Rutilio Grande, one of Romero's closest friends, who had advocated for land reform and better wages for the poor, was killed. Romero canceled Mass across the nation on the day of Grande's funeral to hold a single nationwide service, which was attended by more than 100,000 Salvadorans. At that service, he called the government to account for Grande's death and demanded justice.

More people would die at the hands of government agents in the months and years ahead. When asked by a reporter what he did as archbishop, Romero answered, "I pick up bodies."

As he saw the suffering of the people, he began to work against the status quo, advocating for justice, condemning violence and repression, and challenging profoundly inequitable economic and social structures that exploited the vulnerable and exacerbated poverty while enriching the powerful.

Romero was also influenced by the Vatican II debate over the nature of salvation, the church and its mission. The question was whether God's entry into human history in Jesus was only for eternal life beyond this world, or if salvation also included God's presence in the struggle for social justice, human development and freedom from poverty and oppression in this world.

Romero broadcast his Sunday homilies throughout the nation and became a voice for the voiceless, demanding the government account for increasing numbers of people who were arrested, tortured, abducted and murdered.

"Between the powerful and the wealthy, and the poor and vulnerable, who should a pastor side with?" he asked himself. "I have no doubts. A pastor should stay with his people."

Romero concluded his last sermon, preached at a hospital chapel the week before Palm Sunday, with these words: "Those who surrender to the service of the poor through love of Christ will live like the grain of wheat that dies. It only apparently dies. If it were not to die, it would remain a solitary grain. The harvest comes because of the grain that dies."

Then he lifted the host, asking that the body and blood of Christ would "nourish us also, so that we may give our body and blood to suffering and to pain -- like Christ, not for self, but to teach justice and peace to our people." Shots from a sniper's rifle rang out from the back of the chapel, hitting Romero in the chest.

Two weeks before he died, Romero had revealed that he had received death threats. "If the threats are carried out," he told a journalist, "from this moment I offer my blood to God for the redemption and for the resurrection of El Salvador."

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Luke 4:18-19

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Question: Does this quote from Jesus support the notion that a basic requirement of us as Christians is to act toward social justice?

Galatians 3:28

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Question: If we are all one in Christ is it ok for us to maintain divisions of wealth, status, and freedom?

Prayer for Social Justice (BCP p.823)

Grant, O God, that your holy and life-giving Spirit may so move every human heart, and especially the hearts of the people of this land, that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease; that our divisions being healed, we may live in justice and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*