

ANNUAL THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE ALUMNI MASS**CRYPT CHAPEL OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE****MOST REVEREND JOHN O. BARRES, STD, JCL****OCTOBER 3, 2018**

As we gather to celebrate this Mass as alumni of Theological College and the Catholic University of America, we celebrate the Votive Mass of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal High Priest and the Eucharistic texts of the Letter to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Luke.

Our moment of Catholic American Church History is a moment of great trauma and pain as well as a moment of a deep call of the Holy Spirit leading us to deep Church Reform.

How appropriate that we open ourselves to the cleansing action of the Holy Spirit reforming the Church as we remember that the 17th Century French School of Spirituality, the life of Fr. Jean Jacques Olier and the mission of the Sulpicians which from the very beginning was grounded in a commitment to Church reform and reform of the clergy.

During this Mass and these Alumni Days, we open ourselves to our own internal conversions and reforms that contribute to the progress of Church reform. As Monsieur Olier said: “Le Coeur du Pretre doit etre aussi large que L’Eglise.”/”The Heart of the Priest must be as large as the Church.”

Thank you for the way you live a discipline of the Holy Spirit in regard to your commitment to silence, meditation and mental prayer and your understanding of how this enhances your evangelizing missionary spirit in the parish.

Thank you for your commitment to a spirit of penance and balanced asceticism, an asceticism that embraces the Cross of Christ.

Thank you for your fraternal spirit and charity and the little daily ways that we call each other, share a pastoral insight and support a brother in these painful times.

During these turbulent times we know that the tongues of flame of the Holy Spirit are descending freshly and constantly on each one of us as we embrace the mysterious power of the Cross and discover even more deeply our priestly identity, consecration and mission in the context of a new moment of reform of our Church.

Thank you for your commitment to the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ. In the *Sacrament of Charity*, Pope Benedict reminds us that every reform in the history of the Church is connected to a rediscovery of the life-changing, Church-changing and World-changing truth of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist.

On Sunday, October 14, 2018, the universal Church will celebrate the canonization of Blessed Archbishop Oscar Romero and his courageous human rights witness in history.

Archbishop Romero provides a shining light of hope in a time of turmoil and trouble in both the Church and society.

Archbishop Romero showed the world how a successor of the Apostles should lead.

At 6:25pm on March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador in the small Central American nation of El Salvador, was celebrating Mass at the chapel of the Divina Providencia Cancer Hospital.

During his homily, a gunman entered the chapel and shot him in the heart. Archbishop Romero was murdered because his insistent demands that the poor and marginalized be treated with dignity and respect even in the midst of a bitter civil war proved to be intolerably inconvenient to those who worshipped world power and success and whose faith in Christ fell far below their desire to eliminate an inconvenient voice of conscience.

Archbishop Romero died a Catholic martyr for human rights and human dignity and a courageous advocate of the poor. Surrounded by war, he was a humble peacemaker; surrounded by a culture of death, he was a brave defender of the culture of life.

As a Catholic martyr, Archbishop Romero made the holy sacrifice of his life while celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Catholic Mass.

He teaches us so powerfully that our embrace of the Cross of Christ in our lives connects with the rhythm of the Pascal Mystery Sacrifice of the Mass streaming through every dimension of our lives and missionary spirit.

We can prepare for the Universal Church celebration of this historic moment of his Canonization on October 14th in a variety of ways:

1) We reflect on the heroic life and sanctity of Blessed Archbishop Oscar Romero. Perhaps we watch the film *Romero* starring Raul Julia. We can read some of his homilies and pastoral letters or a biography of the Archbishop.

For example, in Robert Royal's book, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: A Comprehensive World History*, the thirteenth chapter is entitled "Murder in the Cathedral: Archbishop Oscar Arnulfo Romero of El Salvador and Some Latin American Martyrs".

Royal's entire book is an especially helpful overview because it shows the completely global nature of martyrdom in the 20th Century. Each and every chapter demonstrates how warped philosophies and ideologies turned human history in tragic directions with devastating consequences that countless martyrs, time and again, stood up against in every part of the world.

The Splendor of Truth illumines the path of human history, and it illumines the paths of the martyrs like Oscar Romero.

2) We also call for a more intense commitment of the Catholic academic community here at the Catholic University of America and throughout the world to study the Archbishop's Spiritual Theology, Missiology, Homiletics and approach to Catholic Social Justice Teaching and the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy and to share the fruits of this scholarship and the legacy of the Archbishop with future generations.

3) We have conversations with our beautiful El Salvadoran communities (which are very strong here in Washington DC and on Long Island) about the oral tradition passed on by their families and communities about the impact

of Blessed Archbishop Romero on their Catholic faith, their parishes and their country. We seek their advice on how to live in a more intense way the spirit of the saint in the United States.

4)We engage in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue and prayer. The ecumenical and interfaith opportunities can be summarized by the fact that Archbishop Romero is one of the ten 20th Century martyrs depicted in statues above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey in London. There are also many atheists and agnostics who admire the human rights legacy of Archbishop Romero -- so we have a great and natural entrée into discussion about the philosophical and theological foundation of the witness they admire.

5)We take yet another opportunity to connect the Canonization, in a spirit of pastoral charity, promotion of human rights and global justice, to a call for comprehensive immigration reform for our nation that is built on the principles of the dignity of the human person, social justice, the sanctity of human life and the family, and a Good Samaritan love for the poor. There have been many stalls and stiff arms to comprehensive immigration reform in this country. We ask Archbishop Romero's intercession for breakthroughs.

6)We promote a Culture of Life as a response to gang violence on Long Island, gang violence from New York to Los Angeles, and the global gang violence of the drug cartels of the world. We confront the Culture of Death with the Culture of Life by continuing to comfort and support grieving families who have lost young teenagers to gang violence, by providing our young people outstanding Catholic formation and opportunities for Catholic education, and by appealing for the conversion of the hearts, minds and souls of gang members who live in a spiral of suicide of the soul.

7)We present the holiness of Archbishop Romero to the next generation of Catholics. He is a role model for any young person living in any decade, any century, any geographical location and any culture. We ask the Archbishop's intercession for a rich and new harvest of vocations to the priesthood and religious life in our Hispanic communities and in every parish community around the world.

8) Archbishop Romero once said: “The most profound social revolution is the serious, supernatural, interior reform of a Christian.”

Blessed Romero is an ecumenical and interreligious figure of inspiration who is known for his courage, his humanity and his solidarity with the poor. What is often forgotten is that he was a deeply humble man and pastor who was profoundly committed to the Sacrament of Penance in his personal life and who deeply promoted it among the people he served.

Blessed Romero understood both the power of conversion in the Sacrament of Penance and how that conversion could help provide for the social change El Salvador desperately needed.

Like Blessed Romero, when we embrace the personal conversions of the Sacrament of Penance, we see the global challenges of migration through the lens of the Kingdom of God and the prophetic mission of mercy of the Catholic Church on earth rather than through our own limited vision. We begin to better understand our own role in welcoming strangers as we follow Jesus’ call and build a genuine culture of life and civilization of love.¹

9) Blessed Archbishop Romero was no stranger to anguish and pain in Church life. We ask his intercession for the healing of survivors of clergy sexual abuse and a new and powerful experience of Church reform grounded in holiness, mission and a commitment to *dramatic missionary growth*.

And so in anticipation of October 14, 2018:

Mary, Queen of Martyrs, pray for us!

Archbishop Saint Oscar Arnulfo Romero, pray for us!

All Latin American martyrs, pray for us!

¹ Bishop Barres’ September 21, 2017 St. John’s University Founder’s Week Convocation Keynote Address entitled “The Relationship between Catholic Sacramental Theology and Catholic Social Justice Teaching: The Sacrament of Penance in Service of ‘Welcoming the Stranger’”.