

Oscar Romero (Canonized) by Anglican Church

San Salvador March 24, 2001

(es) March is the month in which many people in El Salvador remember one of their many martyrs, Monseñor Oscar Romero. Unfortunately, El Salvador is a country that has a great litany of witnesses for the faith who, during the recent civil war, gave their lives in proclamation of the Gospel. The memory of Archbishop Romero especially focuses the Christian vision of much of the population because of the highly public witness he made as Roman Catholic Metropolitan of El Salvador.

Orientation to a new country frequently includes visits to places that have special significance in the identity of the people. During our first weeks in El Salvador Kay and I had the opportunity to visit several shrines that have meaning because of the witness of Archbishop Romero. We visited the Metropolitan Cathedral from which he preached powerful sermons and in whose crypt is his grave. We also visited the hospital chapel in which in 1980, when the archbishop was

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Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero

LA FUENTE DE LA VIDA

(Water, the Fountain of Life)

(ks) Christians, as is true I suspect of most peoples, understand water as a symbol of life. We use water in baptism and add a little water into the chalice before blessing the bread and wine. We use water as a sign of cleansing and renewal. Jesus spoke of godself as Living Water that gives eternal life. Water is important. Water has the quality of the sacred. Water is a central gift of a wise and loving Creator. For the visitor in foreign places water inevitably becomes a focus. Because much water is contaminated, one can drink only with the utmost care. People tell us to drink liquids from cans or bottles, not soda fountains; the water is not clear of bacteria that can bring suffering to the unwary traveller. In restaurants, they warn, do not accept the traditional *refrescos* that come with your meals. The water may be unsafe. A simple task such as washing dishes can become very complicated. The *pensión* where Ed and I stayed in Xela in Guatemala had figured it out: you could use the regular water (cold, of course) for cleaning the dishes, but the water for rinsing must be *purificado*. To brush one's teeth, one has to use -- even waste -- purified water to rinse the toothbrush. In the shower one must avoid getting water in one's mouth. In foreign places and certainly in Central America water is not dependable. It may be shut down at any time. In San Salvador due to the many repairs necessary to water mains after the earthquakes, the water is frequently down to a

Agua, continued p. 3

FOOTPRINTS OF A JOURNEY

- 26 December 2000 left Vancouver, travelling via Washington, California, Arizona, Texas and Mexico
- 19 January 2001 entered Guatemala: 6 weeks study of Spanish at Proyecto Linguistico Quetzalteco Educativa
- 04 March 2001 entered El Salvador: 4 weeks study of Spanish and Salvadoran culture at Centro de Intercambio y Solidaridad
- 01 April 2001 begin work in diocesan office of La Iglesia Anglicana de El Salvador: orientation to the work of the diocese



celebrating the Great Thanksgiving of the Eucharist, a member of a death squad of the government of that time shot him to death.

The hospital chapel where the archbishop died has a special sense of the mystery of faith. However, a powerful witness to the humility of the prelate is the small room just behind the altar that served as the archiepiscopal palace. He chose to live in this small room, with a hammock for his bed, because it was sufficient for his needs. Later the Carmelite Sisters insisted on building him a small 4-room house nearby.

Don Oscar was a man who allowed himself to be transformed by the Gospel. He came from socially and religiously conservative roots, a person of deep piety and humility, yet obviously a defender of the status quo. His episcopal responsibilities began in the 1970's, a time of brutal repression during which many impoverished persons were killed simply because they might be members of an opposition group. A great number of clergy and lay ministries were tortured and killed for teaching the Gospel message of God's love in a call for justice in the community. The death squads developed a slogan that encapsulates the level of contempt that developed against the Gospel "*Be a Patriot – Kill a Priest*".

Archbishop Romero took his role as spiritual leader quite seriously. During his time in San Salvador he not only preached in the Cathedral but had his homilies broadcast by radio all over the republic. Like the prophets of old, he made clear and direct appeals for justice, listing the names of people assassinated and filling in the concrete details of actions against the people. His appeals called for repentance not vengeance. Unfortunately Romero was only one of a huge cloud of witnesses who gave their lives in following the Gospel; therefore, in recognizing him, we also honour many others.

The leadership and martyrdom of Archbishop Romero is recognized far beyond El Salvador. In fact, in 1998 Queen Elizabeth II with the Duke of Edinburgh, the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, and others, attended a ceremony of installation and unveiling of a statue of the archbishop in Canterbury Cathedral. The life-sized statue was one of ten statues of Twentieth Century Martyrs. Along with Archbishop Romero's, statues of Dr. Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and other representative witnesses were placed in niches above the main door of the 900 year old Cathedral. For Salvadorans this service has special significance. While Anglicanism does not have a process for officially declaring certain persons to be saints, for many El Salvadorans this *canonization* was cause for celebration.

While the Roman Catholic Church has begun a process of canonization of the archbishop, many local people are convinced that reactionary forces in the Vatican are blocking the progress of the church's recognition of this Saint. (*Monseñor Romero: Westminster y Roma*, published by La Universidad de Central América) ✕

Earthquakes

(es) Arriving in El Salvador during this month of recognition has opened our hearts and minds to the depth of witness of the church in this country. We look forward to learning from the witness not only of Romero but also of all those who followed his leadership.

Arriving in El Salvador this year means interacting with the reality of earthquakes. I have heard that people in the north of Canada use many words to describe various types of snow. In El Salvador the people have developed a number of words to describe seismic activity and avoid the main term for earthquake -- *terremoto*. Some of these words include *temblores*, *ondas*, and *sismos*. The recent earthquakes have caused 1,403 deaths, many injuries, and the disruption of highways, blocking of rivers and most obviously the destruction of many homes.

Almost immediately I heard that San Vicente, the town where I served in 1994 as an election observer, is in near total ruin. It's hard to imagine that this place so familiar to me has suffered such devastation. Reconstruction there will require enormous human energy and economic resources.

Kay and I have been able to visit Zaragoza, another municipality near San Salvador (the capital) that was seriously affected by the earthquakes. As we drove into the town, we could see that many of the houses had been taken down. As we began to walk through the streets, we discovered that almost all of the buildings had been seriously affected and would need to be taken down. We went to a hamlet in the municipality in which all of the houses had been destroyed. As a part of our visit we dropped into the *Alcaldía* (municipal office) and found two Canadians from CECI a Quebec-based development agency in the mayor's office. The people from CECI are helping the municipality plan for the most effective use of resources in the process of reconstruction.

The solutions to the problems of rebuilding are not simple.

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HEALTH:

THE CENTRAL AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

(ks) Health service in Central America is both similar and different from Canada. Having availed myself of emergency service, once in Guatemala and once in El Salvador, I have a few observations, mostly agreeable. Both my illnesses were thoughtfully and thoroughly diagnosed, appropriate and effective medication and advice was supplied, and in the case of the dengue fever, follow-up was required.

In both cases I went to private hospitals, as I would not be eligible for the public service. Hospital San Rafael in Xela, Guatemala, formed one section of a large building, nestled in the midst of various shops and businesses that lined the streets while the hospital utilised much of the interior space of the block. The result was quiet if archaic elegance, with tiled floors and 20-foot high ceilings that once had been painted in floral patterns. The well-used furniture appeared as if from the 50's or 60's.

The consulting room was also the delivery room judging from the old examining table with ancient stirrups and the equally ancient warming machine for new-borns. The cupboards reminded me of my grandmother's kitchen. Shining surfaces and hi-tech equipment did not appear. The doctor, maybe 5'5 in jeans, a knit shirt and a baseball cap that he did not remove, looked nearer 20 years old than the 30 I'm confident he was. While there he answered a call on his cell phone -- an experience in ambience anachronistic! Total costs including consultation and lab fees and medications: about \$40.00 Canadian.

Hospital Pro-Familia in San Salvador had a more conventional and infinitely less interesting building, although here, too, the furnishings were, by North American standards, out of date. The blood pressure apparatus showed signs of age. However, disposable hypodermic syringes were used, whereas in Guatemala they were not. Asked to wait for lab results before prescriptions were issued, I remained on the examining table almost 2 hours -- fortunately, because I was too weak to sit for long. In this hotter climate the examining area was air conditioned, something one cannot count on in this country. Total cost at Pro-Familia including medications and follow-up: \$73.64 U. S.

So where are the problems? Obviously the major problem is

trickle. One learns that even in a stream of water the diameter of a soda straw it's possible to shower enough to cool one's body and gain a modicum of cleanliness. Water, on a very hot day, becomes a sign of hope, a sign of life.

In Central America washing machines are becoming a possibility for middle-class people; however, many, many women still wash the family laundry by hand in the *pila* that stands in a small open area behind their house. One of the days that I was in the home of our host family here in San Salvador because of illness, the splashing of the water in the *pila* hardly stopped all day. Dishes, pots and pans must be cleaned. Food must be cleaned. Clothing, bedding, table linens, towels, everything must be washed, and in hot climates, washed often. Ed's teacher in Xela could afford a washing machine, but she refused to buy one. If she did, the woman who came to do her washing would lose a day's work per week. Water can also be a tool of survival for poor women. I find myself wondering, as Ed and I walk carrying our bags of laundry to the nearby *lavandaria*, have we lost touch with the sacredness of water?

I remember that home in Canada water as a resource has become a big issue, another commercialisation of something that should be a basic right. Every human depends on clean water. Water is a resource, it's true; but water is more. Water is essential to life and breath and heart and thought. ✕

Fountain of Life, make us good stewards of your great gift of water. Let us receive it with thanks. Let us use it sparingly and with reverence. In the name of the One who is our true and living water, even Jesus the Christ. Amen.



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About the Anglican Church in El Salvador

- There are approximately 2000 members
- About 12 parishes and missions exist in El Salvador
- Major programmes include the School for the Ministry of Women, the Vacation Bible School, Youth Encounter, ecumenical cooperation, scholarship program, and sports
- Current committees: Women, Youth, Ministry, Education, Evangelism, Social Projects, Stewardship, Ecumenism, and Liturgy
- Service projects include schools, health clinics, support for indigenous peoples, emergencies, immigrants, and pastoral support

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accessibility. Good medical services are here, but how do people, even "middle-class" people, afford them? A language teacher with degree working 10 hours a day with little or no vacation pay makes between \$50 - \$70 Canadian per week. My one visit to the doctor plus medications would annihilate that one-week's pay. While many living costs in Central America are much lower than North America, other expenses are equal or even exceed Canadian costs, especially medications. Most people must use the public services. If they need surgery they will have to save up or get help from relatives. The poor may well do without. The costs of medical insurance are prohibitive both for employers and individuals.

Hospital Pro-Familia is evidently subsidised by U. S. sources possibly linked with Pro-life interests. Costs charged to Salvadorans are lower than I paid but still prohibitive. One has to ask why there is no income tax in these countries to make health care more accessible? In this time of globalisation and the commercialisation of even the most intimate aspects of our lives, perhaps the expectation of communal and co-operative responsibility for health care seems outmoded to some. However, in my belief, every human being has the right to the best possible health care. Many health problems come not from the patient's own behaviour but from poor or damaged water supply, chemical products that would not be approved in North America but are sold by North Americans in less developed countries, and the lack of effective preventative health services. ✂



Ed and Kay Schmitt

At first glance one would think that adobe (unfired mud bricks) would be the worst material to use. Adobe walls turned into dust as they collapsed in the quakes. However, very few people were killed in the adobe houses. Concrete buildings reinforced with steel, especially those that had been previously damaged, caused more deaths. Among the many helpful observations made after the earthquake is that houses built with a type of reinforced adobe withstood the quakes quite well. The University of Central America along with some European partners has developed a type of adobe construction that is fortified by additional material. Ecologically, adobe is a great product since it is almost completely untreated organic material. I am not aware of the proper answer to this question; however, much careful work is going into this problem. In the eyes of many commentators, an important concern seems to be the lack of planning and monitoring that has existed in the country in the past.

The Anglican Church of El Salvador is very much involved in several aspects of this work. With support from groups like the PWRDF it is supporting integrated community development programmes. The Diocese is also offering free mental health counselling to support people who have been emotionally damaged by the quake.

The effects of this series of earthquakes have touched everyone in El Salvador. We pray that the people of this small country will take this opportunity as a means of strengthening the community. ✂

Here in El Salvador, I have often been asked. What must we do? Is there a solution for the situation in El Salvador? I, full of hope and faith, not only divine faith, but also a human faith, also believing in humanity, say: Yes there is a solution.

(Monseñor Romero, February 18, 1979)

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