

## Homily for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

In front of the altar is a picture of Oscar Romero whose 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of his assassination occurs this coming Wednesday. His picture is there because he can take us into the heart of Jesus' words in today's gospel, where he speaks of a grain of wheat dying and bearing a great harvest, those who love life losing it, and those who serve Jesus, following him. Oscar Romero spent much of his life as an unassuming parish priest and academic. He was to discover the cost of discipleship during his three years as Archbishop of San Salvador which came to an abrupt end when he was assassinated on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1980 while he was celebrating Mass, he was just 62 years old. He had ruffled too many feathers by speaking out on behalf of the poor, by criticising an economic system which enriched the few and impoverished the majority and being outspoken against the torture and murder of thousands of Salvadorians. In this he was calling for the Church to stand in solidarity with those on the margins.

In all of these ways Oscar Romero takes us to the heart of Jesus' words in today's gospel: Reflecting on the phrase 'About loving life and losing' it he wrote – "What a terrible thing to have lived quite comfortably, with no suffering, not getting involved in problems, quite tranquil, quite settled, with good connections politically, economically, socially – lacking nothing, having everything. To what good? They will lose their lives." If, on the other hand people are prepared to follow Jesus even to the point of death he wrote: "Those who for the love of Jesus uproot themselves and accompany the people and go with the poor in their suffering and become incarnated and feel as their own the pain and the abuse- they will secure their lives because the Father will reward them."

It is clear that Oscar Romero experienced a change of heart when he became totally involved in the lives of the poor, fulfilling the words of God spoken through Jeremiah, "I will be there God and they shall be my people." Like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and many others before and after him, he acknowledged the sin of staying silent and uninvolved in the face of injustice, violence and oppression and he put into practice Jesus' own preferential option for the poor. Such people seem to have the gospel planted in their hearts, and model their lives on Jesus who, as the letter to the Hebrews tells us in the second reading today, learnt to obey through suffering, as they and we can do as well.

In the responsorial psalm we prayed to a kind and compassionate God to cleanse us from our sins and to create within us a pure heart. In Hebrew thought the heart was the most vital of all the organs. It was also understood to be the location where discernment took place and where decisions were made. It is the same for those for whom mindfulness has been a transforming practice. In this fifth week of Lent perhaps we could spend some time looking into our own heart space, and in the presence of a God who is full of compassion and love, acknowledging the sins in our own lives, for which we are personally responsible, and the sins in the structures and systems of our society and beyond, with which we sometimes collude rather than confront. And, like Oscar Romero and so many other courageous men and women, refuse to stay silent and uninvolved in the face of injustice, but rather to speak out in solidarity with those on the margins, and to speak out for those who are voiceless in our world today.

## Bidding Prayers for the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent

Celebrant:

During his life on earth Christ offered up prayer and entreaty aloud and in silent tears. Uniting our prayers with his we turn to the Father.

Reader:

For the Church – that under the guidance of Pope Francis the Church will help us all to die to selfishness and sin and so yield a rich harvest.

Lord in your mercy

For peace in our world – that we will always remember to pray for those whose lives are blighted by war so that hatred will give way to forgiveness and violence give way to peace'

Lord in your mercy

For those who today suffer for their faith – that their courage and example will strengthen ourselves and others to refuse to remain silent and uninvolved in the struggle against poverty and injustice.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are sick in body, mind and spirit, especially those with dementia and those who care for them – that they will be supported by those who love them.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, especially all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the COVID pandemic, for Fr peter Johnson, a retired priest of the diocese who died last Tuesday, and Kevin Bailey, Joan Yeadsley, Michael Marron, Pauline Fitzgerald, Aiden Breen, James Huston, Cissie Bickers, Frederick John Cox and Elizabeth O'Hara whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...(pause)...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Heavenly Father you have written your law on each of our hearts, help us to love you above all things and our neighbours as ourselves. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen