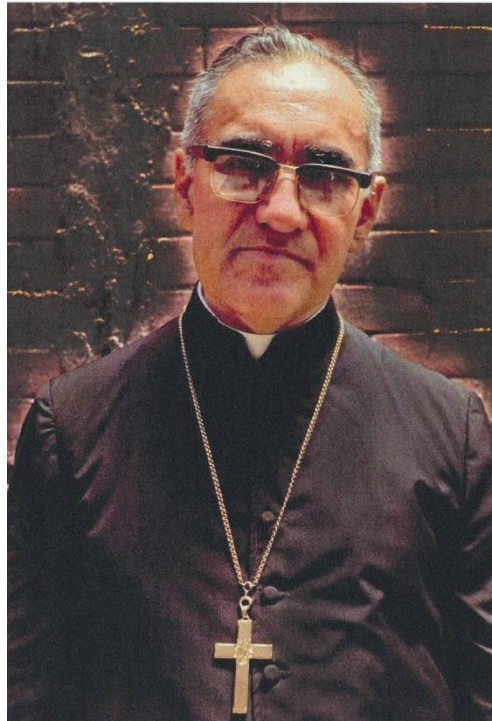


**DIOCESE OF CLEVELAND MISSION OFFICE
&
COAR PEACE MISSION**

Prayer Service



**Celebration of the Martyrdom and Legacy
of St. Oscar A. Romero**

*in thanksgiving for all those who work with and sacrifice for
the people of El Salvador*

March 24, 2025 ~ 3rd Week of Lent

Celebrated at:

St. Rita Parish * 32820 Baldwin Road * Solon, OH 44139

Via livestream: coarpeacemission.org

Order of Service

Welcome

Melanie Reda
President, Board of Directors,
COAR Peace Mission

Entrance Hymn: *Romero Hymn*

Verses: 1, 2, & 3
(sung to the tune of *Ode to Joy*)

God, you raise up true disciples, teachers, martyrs, deep in faith.
Like Romero, holy people, giving witness to your grace.
Let us listen to their voices, speaking of new ways to live.
By their words and by their actions, we may know the love you give.

Yours the gospel that disturbs us, words that must demand a choice;
Speaking to a broken people, hope for those who have no voice.
Stir in us your call to action, rouse us from our apathy.
In the places lost to darkness, we will shine for all to see.

Still our brothers, sisters suffer, helpless and afraid to speak,
Victims of oppressors using power to dominate the weak.
When we see injustice near us, we will cry out "This must cease!"
And by our example, turn this world from violence back to peace.

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Opening Remarks and Prayer

Reverend Thomas Behrend
Pastor, St. Rita Parish

I welcome you to this celebration of St. Romero. I know that many groups who work in El Salvador are present tonight and many more are watching via livestream.

We come together in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in El Salvador and the people all over the world who find inspiration in St. Romero's life and his words.

We also honor all of you who have been involved in ministering in El Salvador, many who have gone in person, and formed deep bonds with the Salvadoran people.

We join now in prayer under the inspiration of St. Romero, martyr for justice, for peace and non-violence, martyr of our faith.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit...

Christ of the margins,
 Help us to recognize you in the faces of the poorest and most vulnerable people. Be with us as we gather together and pray that your justice will reign throughout the earth.

We pray that we may, in the spirit of St. Oscar Romero, be courageous enough to speak out on behalf of those who face injustice, no matter the cost.

In your name we pray. Amen

Reading/Lectura
Romans 12:1-2
Romanos 12:1-2

Karem Pérez Lucas
 Abigail Pérez Lucas
 Parishioners, St. Rita Parish

A Reading from the letter of St. Paul to the Romans.

I urge you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.

The Word of the Lord.

Una lectura de la carta de San Pablo a los Romanos.

Por lo tanto, hermanos, les ruego por la misericordia de Dios que ofrezcan sus cuerpos como ofrenda viva, santa y agradable a Dios, que es su culto espiritual. No se amolden a este mundo, sino sean transformados mediante la renovación de su mente, para que puedan discernir cuál es la voluntad de Dios, lo que es bueno, agradable y perfecto.

Palabra de Dios.

Word and Song
 Excerpts from *Memories in Mosaic*
 by María López Vigil
God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness)

Please follow along with the refrain on the following page. You may come forward to place your flowers on the altar during the song.

Reader

Deacon Mark Janezic
 Deacon, St. Rita Parish

Reader

Daphne Held
 Parishioner, St. Rita Parish
 Board Member, COAR Peace Mission

God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness) Refrain:

God of the poor, friend of the weak, give us com-
 - sion we pray, melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain.
 Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

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Memories in Mosaic

The following collage of personal memories helps paint a portrait of how God acted within St. Romero, and how compassion keeps winning over ideology.

Father Romero? He was a friend of the poor and a friend of the rich. To the rich he would say, “Love the poor.” and to us poor he would tell us to love God, and that God knew what He was doing by putting us last in line, and that afterwards we would be assured a place in heaven. He would preach to us about the heaven where rich people who gave alms would go and where poor people who didn’t cause too much trouble would go.

María Varona

He celebrated a memorial mass for the dead at Tres Calles. That’s where I met him. That Monseñor Romero made me mad. He was so wishy-washy! He talked about “the dead” instead of the people who had been “murdered” and he preached a sermon condemning violence, which practically suggested that those poor men had been killed because they were violent, that they somehow had it coming to them.

Rafel Moreno

We went looking for him to offer our support. He didn’t seem like a powerful hierarch to me, more like a brother. “I feel more comfortable with you people who aren’t Catholic than with some from my own Church”. He confessed shortly after meeting us. Monseñor added a lot of momentum to the ecumenical movement that was starting to build in El Salvador between Catholics and Protestants – Lutherans, Episcopalians and Baptists. We were all involved in the same kind of work.

Edgar Palacios

Verse 1 and Refrain: God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness)

I certainly did meet Monseñor Romero. And even if I live to be 100 years old, I'll never forget it. He visited our canton for the festival of Saint Anthony. A big crowd showed up to receive him, and since there were so many of us that we didn't all fit in the church, he said we should have the Mass under a tree outside. He seemed to me to be a good-humored man, and kind of quiet, like us.

Later on in the afternoon there was a long line to see him off. I was the last to say good-bye. When he hugged me, he said "Pray for me".

He wanted me, an old sinful woman, to pray for him! How many times does that happen? It's supposed to be the priest that prays for you and lifts you up to God, but not with him. He turned that rule upside down.

Santos Martínez

Why did you change, Monseñor?

"You know, I ask myself that same question when I'm in prayer...." He stopped walking and was silent.

And do you find an answer, Monseñor?

Some answers, yes...It's just that we all have our roots you know...I was born into a poor family. I've suffered hunger. I know what it's like to work from the time you're a little kid...When I went to seminary and started my studies, and then they sent me to finish studying here in Rome, I spent years and years absorbed in my books, and I started to forget about where I came from. I started creating another world. When I went back to El Salvador, they made me the bishop's secretary in San Miguel. I was a parish priest for 23 years there, but I was still buried under paperwork. And when they sent me to San Salvador to be the auxiliary bishop, I fell into the hands of Opus Dei, and there I remained....

We were walking slowly. It seemed like he wanted to keep talking.

Then they sent me to Santiago de Maria, and I ran into extreme poverty again. Those children that were dying just because of the water they were drinking, those campesinos killing themselves in the harvest...You know, father, when a piece of charcoal has already been lit once, you don't have to blow on it much to get it to flame up again. And everything that happened to us when I got to the archdiocese, what happened to Fr. Grande and all.....it was a lot. You know how much I admired him. When I saw him dead, I thought, "If they killed him for what he was doing, it's my job to go down that same road..." So, yes, I changed. But I also came back home again.

César Jerez

"It has become my job to tend to all the wounds produced by the persecution of the Church – to record the abuses and pick up the bodies. Today it is my job to tend to this church, this space that has been violated, this sanctuary that has been destroyed and, above all, these people who have been humiliated and sacrificed in such an inhuman way."

That's how Monseñor Romero began his homily. If a person were to ask a bishop what his mission is, he might say anything but that. But that day Romero said his job was to go around gathering dead bodies. Precisely, in the El Salvador of that time,

the most realistic mission, the one most in line with the historical moment, was for a bishop to retrieve the daily dead, to receive them, to gather them in.

Jon Sobrino

Verse 2 and Refrain: God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness)

Every day, what he said was what gave us life. His sermons were the most eagerly anticipated event of the week. I was working in the communities of San Ramon, and on Sundays I would leave my house and walk to the Cathedral. I didn't have to carry a radio with me to hear his homily, because I could hear it the whole way there; there wasn't a single house that didn't have its radio on listening to him. My entire route was a homily! It was a chain of radios with a broadcast as uninterrupted as if it were a single transmission.

Martina Guzmán

In the mornings we had to sweep and clean the whole building. They had these enormous brooms and these immense mops, and we had to make those halls, that were as long as railroad tracks, shine. One day I was going along with that monster of a mop - shining up the hall in front of the chapel on the top floor. As I went by, I saw that at that early hour of the morning, there was a priest praying in one of the front pews. He was all alone, kneeling.

After a while I had practically polished the whole floor, and he was still in there praying. The fool didn't even move! I went down another hall and got it all shiny, and then went back and peeked into the chapel. There he was, still kneeling! "What's he doing there, praying so much?" I thought. Another 15 minutes went by and he was still there. "Why so much prayer? With all that is happening in this country, all he can think of to do is pray? He should learn a few things from Monseñor Romero, a man with fire in his heart and in his words, a man who doesn't waste his time! Hadn't he even heard that song, "Praying is not enough?" He ought to listen to some of those homilies."

I was angry with the praying man, whoever he was. "if he doesn't come out, I'm going in to mop the chapel" I needed to clean it, but I also wanted to see whether maybe he was just sleeping.

Finally I went in. I wanted to get a good look at the man so I could tell the rest of the guys at breakfast. I went up and down with the mop, getting closer and closer to that motionless lump of a man, and I looked at him from head to toe...It was Monseñor Romero.

Juan José Ramírez

A congressman from the US was passing through El Salvador and went to Mass one Sunday at the Cathedral. The church was full to overflowing. He was moved by the piety of all the poor people and by Romero's homily. But what really made an impression on that gringo's heart was the lousy shape the Cathedral was in.

"This church doesn't give a good impression", he lamented. Doesn't Monseñor Romero take care of his most important church?

They told him that when Romero had become archbishop, he'd begun a plan to rebuild, but that soon he'd changed his mind.

“This is not the most important thing”, he’d said.
 For Monseñor, people came first. And that’s why he said the cathedral would remain that way: half done, as a monument to the people who don’t have a roof over their heads or land to plant on, people who have neither bread nor peace.
Antonio Fernández Ibáñez

Verse 5 and Refrain: God of the Poor (Beauty for Brokenness)

Student Reflections

Rylee Malafarina
 Samuel Rodríguez
 Eliza Tambor
 St. Rita School

St. Oscar Romero is a very influential man, who through a time of darkness and separation brought so many people together. St. Romero inspires me to be strong in my faith and he helps guide me to be loving, fair, and gracious. With the inspiration of St. Romero I feel motivated to help change the world and create a place full of respect, equality and serenity.
Rylee Malafarina

St. Oscar Romero used his position to speak out against the injustices in El Salvador. He was brave and continued to praise the Lord and speak out, despite the dangers. St. Romero can inspire me to be righteous and to stand up for those being oppressed.
Samuel Rodriguez

St. Romero inspires me to help those who have no hope and need the most help they can get. He inspires me to consider the small blessings in life such as shelter and food. He can inspire everyone in the world to remember those who aren’t as fortunate as ourselves, and that they deserve the help they need as well.
Eliza Tambor

Reflection Hymn: *I Will Choose Christ*

St. Rita Parish Children’s Choir

See next page

I will ___ choose Christ. I will ___ choose love. I choose ___ to serve. ___

I give ___ my heart. I give ___ my life.

I give ___ my all ___ to you. ___ to you. ___

Final *Fine*

to you. ___ I give ___ my all ___ to you. ___

1. How many times ___ must he call my ___ name and show to

2. Christ, my teach - er and heal - er, teach my

3. As I look up-on ___ your cross. so too ___

1. me that he is God? And as a ser-vant he

2. heart and heal my soul. And as I walk this

3. ___ must I die with you. ___ And with the death of my

1. calls to me. "You must ___ serve too." ___ *D.C.*

2. road with you. teach me ___ to love. ___ *D.C.*

3. own de - sires. I'll rise ___ with you. ___ *D.C.*

Intercessions
Spanish
English

Cristina Rodríguez
Claudio Rodríguez
Parishioners, St. Rita Parish

Response to Intercessions:

Lord, hear our prayer; De-us, ex-au-di nos; Se-nor es-cú-cha-nos.

With eyes of faith and hope, we now turn to a loving God in prayer. As we celebrate St. Oscar Romero, we still face many challenges. May we imitate St. Romero as we lift up our intercessions. (short pause)

Por la paz en los lugares que se encuentran en guerra, con pobreza e injusticia, para que los líderes del gobierno se inspiren en la visión que San Oscar Romero tenía para la humanidad.

For peace in places of war, poverty and injustice, and that leaders of government be inspired by St. Romero's vision for humanity, we pray to the Lord.

Por el hermoso pueblo de El Salvador, para que superen la violencia, la desigualdad y la injusticia.

For the beautiful people of El Salvador, that they may rise above violence, inequality and injustice, we pray to the Lord.

Por la valentía de unirnos al Papa Francisco en reprender a nuestros líderes gubernamentales por sus inhumanos esfuerzos de deportación masiva.

For the courage to join Pope Francis in chastising our government leaders for their inhumane mass deportation efforts, we pray to the Lord.

Por la beatificación de Rutilio Grande y las mujeres mártires de El Salvador.

For the beatification of Rutilio Grande and the women martyrs of El Salvador, we pray to the Lord.

Por los niños de COAR y por todas las organizaciones, grupos e individuos que caminan en solidaridad con el pueblo de El Salvador.

For the children of COAR and all organizations, groups and individuals who walk in solidarity with the people of El Salvador, we pray to the Lord

Que nuestros corazones tengan una transformación Cuaresmal a la imagen de la transformación profética de San Oscar Romero.

For the Lenten transformation of our hearts into the image of St. Romero’s prophetic transformation, we pray to the Lord.

Por la continua curación del Papa Francisco, y por la salud de todos aquellos por los que hemos prometido orar.

For continued healing for Pope Francis, and the healing of others for whom we have promised to pray, we pray to the Lord.

Por las peticiones ofrecidas en toda América del Norte; aquellas en las tarjetas colocadas en el altar, y por aquellas oraciones que ahora ofrecemos en el silencio de nuestros corazones... (pausa)

For petitions offered across North America; those on the cards placed at the altar, and for those prayers we offer now in the silence of our hearts....(pause)we pray to the Lord.

Loving Creator, we call on You through the intercession of St. Romero to help us become instruments of peace in our world; to respond to situations of injustice, inequality and poverty with calls to action for justice. This we ask through Christ our Lord.

AMEN

Closing Blessing

Reverend Behrend

May God bless you with anger at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people, so that you will work for justice, equity and peace.

Response: God has chosen me.

May God bless you with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that you will reach out your hand to comfort them and change their pain to joy.

God has chosen me.

And may God bless you with the foolishness to think that you can make a difference in the world, so that you will do the things which others tell you cannot be done.

God has chosen me.

Christ Jesus, we trust that you will walk with us on our journey of discipleship, wherever it may lead. May our walk be one of true solidarity, as St. Romero’s was.

AMEN

Closing Hymn: *Christ Be Our Light*

St. Rita Children's Choir

Verses



1. Long-ing for light, — we wait in dark-ness. Long-ing for
2. Long-ing for peace, — our world is trou-bled. Long-ing for
3. Long-ing for food, — man-y are hun-gry. Long-ing for
4. Long-ing for shel-ter, man-y are home-less. Long-ing for
5. Man-y the gifts, — man-y the peo-ple, man-y the



1. truth, — we turn to you. Make us your own, —
2. hope, — man-y de-spair. Your word a-lone —
3. wa-ter, man-y still thirst. Make us your bread, —
4. warmth, — man-y are cold. Make us your build-ing,
5. hearts that yearn to be-long. Let us be ser-vants



1. your ho-ly peo-ple, light for the world to see.
2. has pow'r to save us. Make us your liv-ing voice.
3. bro-ken for oth-ers, shared un-til all are fed.
4. shel-ter-ing oth-ers, walls made of liv-ing stone.
5. to one an-oth-er, mak-ing your king-dom come.

Refrain



Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts. Shine through the dark-ness.



Christ, be our light! Shine in your church gath-ered to-day.

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Thanks

Thank you to the following groups and individuals who contributed to tonight's St. Romero Prayer Service:

- St. Rita Parish, Solon, OH
 - Rev. Thomas J. Behrend, Pastor
 - David Jaronowski, Music Director
 - Mary DeMarco, Children's Choir Director
- Event Committee members:
 - Daphne Held, Chairperson
 - John Hannon
 - Terry Tusim
- Diocese of Cleveland Mission Office
 - Rev. Stephen Vellenga, Director
- COAR Peace Mission Board of Directors
- COAR Children's Village Staff and Residents
 - Archbishop José Luis Escobar Alas
 - Rev. Edwin Alexander Henríquez Márquez, Administrator
 - Licda. Marta Elizabeth Calderón Aguirre, Director

**All those donors and volunteers who work and sacrifice
and pray for the well-being of the people of El Salvador,
the living legacy of St. Oscar A. Romero.**

<https://www.dioceseofcleveland.org/offices/mission-office/overview>

www.coarpeacemission.org

***¡Viva San Romero!
¡Que viva!***

If you would like to make a free will offering to the Diocese of Cleveland Mission Office to support the work of the St. Rita CLAM team in El Salvador, you may do so in the vestibule.

**Please join us for refreshments and fellowship
at the conclusion of the Prayer Service!**

El Salvador Updates from Around the Diocese

Thanks, too, to those around our Diocese serving the missions in El Salvador in different ways, shapes, and forms. Your service honors St. Romero's legacy and that of our own Cleveland martyrs, Sr. Dorothy Kazel, OSU, and Ms. Jean Donovan.

COAR Peace Mission, Wickliffe

COAR Peace Mission has been supporting the COAR Children's Village and COAR school in Zaragoza, El Salvador, since the Salvadoran Civil War in the 1980s. Today, we have about 30 children in permanent, residential, foster care. For these children, COAR supplies 100% of the funding for food, medicine, medical specialists, clothing, school tuition and supplies, housemothers, psychologists, social workers, everything they need to begin to heal from the trauma they experienced before coming to COAR. The COAR school educates about 1,000 students, grades preK-12. This year, COAR has started to offer scholarships to local, non-resident students in order to help them further their education at the high school level.

Resurrection Church, Solon

Our blessed sacrament chapel was dedicated to the martyrs of El Salvador. Hanging in the chapel are images of Saint Oscar Romero, the churchwomen, the Jesuits, and their housekeeper and daughter.

Every year on or around the time of the death of the churchwomen, our parish hosts a prayer service to commemorate their martyrdom, as well as to keep the history of our diocese and mission in El Salvador alive among our parishioners and those who celebrate with us. We often celebrate this prayer service in collaboration with other entities within the diocese.

We continue to offer financial support to a woman's cooperative in El Salvador that provides tuition assistance for young women going to college or off to trade schools.

St. Barnabas Church, Northfield

St. Barnabas is excited to host Fr. John Ostrowski, pastor of San Pedro Apostól parish in Teotepeque, El Salvador, in May during his visit to the US. Fr. John will be accompanied by two of the Franciscan sisters that work with him in the parish. They will attend the priesthood ordination for Deacon Jeffrey Lindholm, who spent a summer ministering with Fr. John and will also meet with supporters at St. Barnabas, St. Rita, and St. Albert the Great.

St. Dominic Church, Shaker Heights

The St Dominic El Salvador mission program supports the community of Chiltiupán, El Salvador with many active ministries. These include a college scholarship program (with 130 current students), the Santo Domingo Clinic, a Salvadoran construction team, monthly food baskets, and more. We offer 6 mission trips each year and staff four full-time Salvadorans that lead our programs, and help set up and facilitate these mission trips. These trips have been so impactful that a few families and a couple other parishes have used these holy men to facilitate their own mission trips! We are blessed by wonderfully generous parishioners, partner churches and friends that all give financially and spiritually to this program and are answering the call of St. Romero to serve the poor. We are proud to carry on the Diocese of Cleveland CLAM initiative, and follow the lead of so many holy men and women, especially Sr. Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, Sr. Ita Ford, and Sr. Maura Clarke.

St. Joseph's Church, Strongsville

We have a sister parish in San Jose Villanueva (SJV), El Salvador that was established by Fr. Bob Sanson and grown by Pat Greco with in-country visits beginning in 2004. This is a spiritual partnership that reciprocates both ways, as we pray for each other, parish families, priests, and leaders. We have an annual scholarship drive, which raises \$10-12K per year for the Catholic students in SJV and goes towards tuition, shoes, books and other needs. This overview and coordination is provided by and supports Epilogos Charities Inc, a US based nonprofit that in turn helps support the same community in El Salvador. In addition to the scholarships, the parish supports smaller projects in the SJV community through the "Sharing Tree" and one envelope per year. Students at our parish school, Sts. Joseph and John (a combination of St. John Neumann and St. Joseph's in Strongsville), also maintains a letter exchange program. Teachers at the school in SJV have even been able to visit Strongsville through the "Connecting Communities and Cultures" program, which provides great momentum in maintaining our sister parish connection.

St. Rita Church, Solon

The Saint Rita CLAM Team nurtures relationships between Saint Rita parishioners and our brothers and sisters in El Salvador through education, group travel, mission trips, and sharing of funds and resources. We hope to have a teen trip in 2026. We have been working with Fr. John Ostrowski in Teotepeque and Fr. Paul Schindler in La Libertad to assist with any needs that arise within their parishes. Our focus for 2025/26 will be repairs and improvements to the church and convent in Teotepeque, as well as college scholarships.