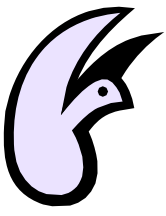


HOMILY: Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland, Mass. June 21, 2009

It is a privilege to speak about El Salvador because I believe it is a small country with a lot to give. I am reminded of this nearly every Sunday this Pentecost, as the Salvadoran experience offers us profound insights into what Pentecost and the church's mission.

To gain perspective on today's lessons and gospel reading, I want to briefly rewind to the question posed to Jesus in last week's parable of the mustard seed, "to what can we compare the kingdom of heaven?" El Salvador's martyrs and theologians offer us a clarification of the mustard seed analogy. They often speak of "The kingdom of Heaven" in terms of a project to bring about a more humane world, "**The project of the kingdom of heaven.**" This terminology reminds us that, although we may not understand the holy mystery of germination, the work of sowing and caring for the seed is ours to do. The kingdom of heaven seen through this lens quickly moves us from passive germination to an empowered and bold mission to reach out and create a better world in god's image. The project of the kingdom of heaven is the mission given to the church in Pentecost. Stepping into this weeks reading the question to Jesus would be "to what can we compare the project of the kingdom of heaven?" And the answer is that our mission is comparable to slaying a giant or calming a storming sea.

Recently I was speaking with a very close North American friend who I met in El Salvador about the topic of how we do mission in the church. She told me that she could identify three models of mission. The first is linked to the traditional evangelization; this is the old mission model that is about converting "**them.**" In the colonial period this model was practiced in the conversion of the "savages races." The modern form of the "Them Model" is not as nearly as harsh, it is about building **them** schools, giving them food **them**, or giving **them** medicine. The second model is the "**me**" model, with its roots in pilgrimage to holy sites in search of vocation and meaning. The third model is the "**Us**" model, in which, mission is something that we do together in communion. It is a more complicated model because it requires more than giving and receiving, it is accompaniment, it is transforming and being transformed.

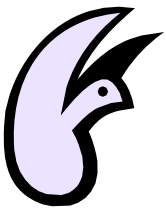


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I believe El Salvador is a particular inspiring country for mission because the recent Salvadoran struggle to define mission is comparable to the calming of a bloody and stormy sea. For centuries the Church's mission in much of Latin America has been aligned with the interests and power of the landed elite. In the 1960's and 1970's however, this began to change as people questioned this mission and asked how the modern church reflected the life of Christ. From this discussion emerged a new option for the church, "the preferential option for the poor." The expression of this new option reached a pinnacle in El Salvador with the ascension of Oscar Anulfo Romero to the Bishopric of San Salvador.

For those who are not familiar with the name Monseñor Romero, he was man of humble roots who was appointed Arch Bishop during the political and social turmoil of the in the mid nineteen seventies. He was appointed under the presumption that he would be moderate at a time when social unrest, violence, and repression were tearing though most of Central America. After the murder of one Romero's closest colleagues, Father Rotillio Grande, he rapidly underwent a conversion and became a powerful voice in defense of peace, human rights, and the poor. He was the voice of the voiceless. He is remembered by the people as Romero, a prophet and martyr, Romero, The Patron Saint of the Americas. In the Anglican Communion he is remembered as a modern martyr, and his statue stands beside Martin Luther's above the great west door of Westminster Abbey.

Romero was very clear on mission, "The mission of the church," he said "is to identify its self with the poor... only this way will the church find Salvation." Famously he said before his death, "that if the come to kill me, "My voice will be resurrected in the Salvadoran people." Indeed, today we live that resurrection, and in the last two decades the call to defend human rights and eradicate poverty has received an unprecedented response, not only in El Salvador, but across the globe. In the Episcopal Church, there is new enthusiasm for this work, and terms like sustainable development, public health, and primary education are on the tip of every mission



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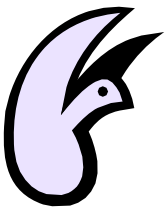
committees tongue. It would seem that we are enjoying a new clarity about our modern Christian mission. Amidst the clarity and enthusiasm, however, there is a great deal of confusion about what the church's specific mission model should be. How do we seek these goals? Will this mission be about **them, me, or us**?

In a homily about a month before his murder, at the time when the conflict between the ruling military regime and the multitudes of social, religious, and political movements were on the brink of civil war, Romero joyfully proclaimed, "This will be our best Lent to work for social justice and love the poor." He offered the Christian perspective that, "Social justice is not just a law that orders distribution, rather, and internal attitude with Christ, that in being rich we become poor to share our hearts with the poor." Speaking to entrenched power Romero says, "I hope that this call does not harden the hearts of the oligarchs, rather that it moves them to conversion," and he called on them to, "**Share what you are and what you have.**"

Romero's call to mission is not to give to the poor in a "**Them**" model, rather to join them, it is about **Us** together in accompaniment. He calls us to move beyond the charitable distribution of resources and challenges us to give ourselves to one another to become new. This call poses a question for our new age of poverty eradication, development, and mission. Will it be possible to achieve our goals, if our strategies are limited to the designation of more funding to aid the sick and the poor? Or must we go further? "**Share who you are and what you have.**"

In our time, as in Romero's, this is a very dangerous proposition, because it requires us to change. Change is not easy; the biblical equivalent is likened to doing battle with a giant or taming storming seas. We fear change.

Romero, concludes the homily addressing our fear of change and its subsequent violence, speaking again to the powerful elites of his day, he said, "Do not continue failing us with violence against those of us who are to achieve a more just distribution of power and wealth in this country." Then he pauses, and his voice changes, "I am speaking in the first person," he says "because I received a warning that I am in the list



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of those who are going to be eliminated next week, but **let it be known,**" he says " **that nobody can kill the voice of justice now.**"

A month after giving this homily a single, silenced bullet pierced Romero's heart while celebrating the Eucharist at the hospital for terminal cancer patients where he lived.

The call for justice often bears a great price. Romero preached once that persecution is something necessary for the church because the truth is always persecuted. When the church is fulfilling its true duty," he said, "it will always be persecuted." "We are one holy, catholic, apostolic, and persecuted church."

In mission let us not forget Romero's life and words. Let this be our best Pentecost to go out and share not only what we have, but also who we are. We will not be afraid to face stormy seas, to change, and we will not let our hearts harden to this call, rather, we will move to transform our hearts, our communities, and the world beyond. We will not fear that in telling the truth and acting for justice we will be persecuted because, in mission together, **nobody can kill the voice of justice now!**

En el nombre del padre del hijo y el episirtu santo tuyo es el reino tuyo es el poder por los siglso del los siglos amen.