Spirituality
Vatican



The banners of new saints Oscar Romero and Paul VI hang from the facade of St. Peter's Basilica as Pope Francis celebrates the canonization Mass Oct. 14. (CNS photo/Paul Haring)



Joshua J. McElwee

View Author Profile



Heidi Schlumpf

View Author Profile

Follow on Twitter at @heidischlumpf

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Vatican City — October 14, 2018

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Declaring Pope Paul VI and martyred Salvadoran Archbishop Óscar Romero saints of the global Catholic Church, Pope Francis said the two prelates show that Christians are called not to take "half measures" but to strive for holiness, even sometimes at the risk of their own safety.

At a Mass with tens of thousands in St. Peter's Square for the canonizations of Paul, Romero and five others Oct. 14, the pontiff said the human heart "can cling to one master only and it must choose."

"Either it will love God or it will love the world's treasure; either it will live for love or it will live for itself," said the pope. "Let us ask for the grace always to leave things behind for love of the Lord: to leave behind wealth, the yearning for status and power."

Reflecting on the witness of Paul — who led the Catholic Church from 1963-78 and presided over the reforms of the landmark Second Vatican Council — Francis said Paul "urges us, together with the Council whose wise helmsman he was, to live our common vocation: the universal call to holiness."

"Not to half measures, but to holiness," the pope clarified.

Francis then called it "wonderful" that Romeo was being canonized alongside the late pontiff, saying the Salvadoran "left the security of the world, even his own safety, in order to give his life according to the Gospel, close to the poor and to his people, with a heart drawn to Jesus and his brothers and sisters."

Romero, named by Paul to lead the archdiocese of San Salvador in 1977, was shot dead while celebrating Mass in 1980 after his denunciations of government killings and kidnappings that would eventually lead to El Salvador's bloody, 12-year civil war.

For many, the slain archbishop's canonization represents the culmination of one of the clearest turnabouts of Francis' five-year papacy, as Romero's cause had languished for decades under Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI.

Where John Paul and Benedict had expressed unease with Romero's denunciations, fearing the influence of liberation theology in his writings and homilies, Francis, the first pontiff from the Americas, has praised a model of a bishop caring for his people.

Francis declared Romero a martyr in 2015, and authorized his beatification later that year.

Mercy Sr. Ana María Pineda, a Salvadoran and author of a book that explored Romero's relationship with Jesuit Fr. Rutilio Grande, who was assassinated three years before the archbishop, called the canonization a "powerful statement" and a "great validation."

Romero's sainting "validates in what other moments of history was seen as controversial and oftentimes in opposition to the church, to society and those who held power in El Salvador," said Pineda, in Rome for the event.

Romero is "a remarkable example of what it means to be a truly faithful Christian," she said.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, the postulator, or promoter, of Romero's sainthood cause said on twitter Oct. 13 that the archbishop "taught, and teaches, us that no burden is too heavy, no opposition too powerful, to keep us from doing right, and doing good, in Jesus' name."

Among the five others canonized Oct. 14 were two Italian priests, an Italian lay youth, and German and Spanish founders of separate women's religious orders.

Fr. Antonio Marrazzo, the postulator of Paul VI's cause, said in a brief Oct. 13 interview that the seven new saints show "seven different ways to respond to God's call."

"We give thanks to God for this," said Marrazzo, adding that it shows Catholics to "give what you can with what God has given you."

The German woman canonized was Sr. Maria Katharina Kasper, founder of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, whose sisters came to Indiana in 1868. Current Superior General Sr. Gonzalo Vakasseril said it was appropriate that Kasper was sainted by Francis, who has made the poor a priority.

"She was a very simple woman who could hear the Spirit speaking to her," Vakasseril told NCR Oct. 13. "She could just respond to what she heard in heart, and she heard in heart about the poor, about the sick, about the needy and about her neighbor."

The formal declarations of sainthood came at the beginning of the Oct. 14 Mass.

After being so petitioned by Cardinal Angelo Becciu, the prefect of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints*, Francis formally enrolled the seven among the saints and decreed that "they are to be venerated as such by whole church."

Enrolling each new saint separately, the pontiff read aloud a Latin transliteration of their names: "Paulum VI," "Ansgarium Arnolfum Romero," and so on.



Paul VI and Oscar Romero pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/Equipo Maiz, courtesy CAFOD, Just One World)

Francis was reflecting in his homily on Mark's account of Jesus' encounter with a young man, who said he followed the Ten Commandments and asked what he could do to ensure his place in Heaven. Jesus told the man to sell what he had, give to the poor, and become a disciple.

The Gospel says the man went away sad, "for he had many possessions."

"That man was speaking in terms of supply and demand, Jesus proposes to him a story of love," said Francis. "He asks him to pass from the observance of laws to the gift of self, from doing for oneself to being with God."

"The Lord does not discuss theories of poverty and wealth, but goes directly to life," said the pontiff. "He asks you to leave behind what weighs down your heart, to empty yourself of goods in order to make room for him, the only good."

"We cannot truly follow Jesus when we are laden down with things," the pope continued. "Because if our hearts are crowded with goods, there will not be room for

the Lord, who will become just one thing among the others."

"For this reason, wealth is dangerous and — says Jesus — even makes one's salvation difficult," said Francis. "Not because God is stern, no! The problem is on our part: our having too much, our wanting too much suffocates our hearts and makes us incapable of loving."

Francis also called Paul, who concluded the Second Vatican Council after the death of Pope John XXIII, "a prophet of a Church turned outwards, looking to those far away and taking care of the poor."

The Oct. 14 canonizations came during an ongoing Oct. 3-28 worldwide meeting of Catholic prelates known as a Synod of Bishops. The synod process was created by Paul after the end of the Council to allow global prelates to come to Rome every few years to discuss issues facing the church.

This month's gathering is focusing on the needs of young people today.

Paul also reaffirmed the Catholic Church's opposition to birth control with his 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, against the advice of a commission he asked to study the matter. That teaching caused upset among many Catholics, and is widely ignored in the U.S.

Pineda, whose volume *Romero & Grande: Companions on the Journey* was published in 2016, said it was important not to place the new saint archbishop on a pedestal.

"He wasn't a perfect man, and that, to me, is the most encouraging part of his life: that he was a man, like all of us who are frail and have our own human limitations," she said. "But there was this ongoing desire to become a better person. Maybe for all of us, there is an encouragement and witness in his life that we can also do great things."

[Joshua J. McElwee is NCR Vatican correspondent. His email address is jmcelwee@ncronline.org. Heidi Schlumpf is NCR national correspondent. Her email address is hschlumpf@ncronline.org.]

**This story has been edited to correct the name of Becciu's congregation.*

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Memories of Romero** feature series. View the full series.

A version of this story appeared in the **Nov 2-15, 2018** print issue under the headline: Sainting Romero and Paul VI, Francis says: no 'half measures' to holiness.