Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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March 8, 2023
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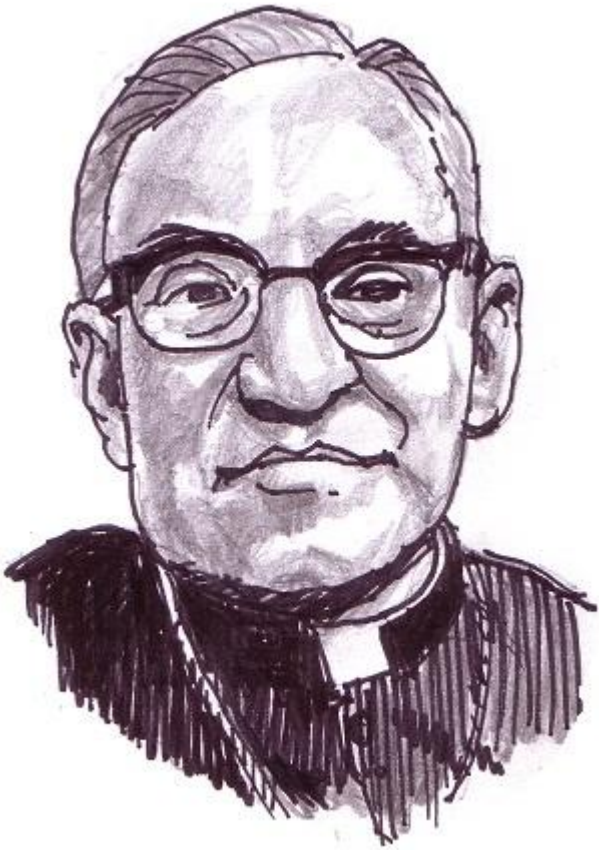

“Father Abraham, have pity on me” (Luke 16:25).

Jer 17:5-10; *Lk 16:19-31*

Today’s Gospel of “Lazarus and the Rich Man” reminds us of Saint Oscar Romero, the martyred archbishop of El Salvador, whose death anniversary will be later this month (March 24, 1980).

Jesuit Fr. Jon Sobrino, who knew Archbishop Oscar Romero personally and advised him on theological questions, said the secret of his spirituality was his encounter with God in the poor. This idea, expressed at the regional bishops meeting in Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, of “God’s preferential option for the poor,” became the foundation of Romero’s theology and his understanding of church because of what he was experiencing in his pastoral contacts with the defenseless campesino communities suffering violence in El Salvador.

Sobrino described Romero during his frequent visits in the towns and villages: “The poor fairly swarmed around him. He took them to his heart, and they were there to stay. And they took him to their hearts, where he has remained to this day” (Witnesses to the Kingdom, Orbis, 2003, p. 20).

Romero’s “conversion,” Sobrino reflected, was to discover a new image of God, the One who accompanies the poor, entering their innocent vulnerability and suffering. Rather than the notion of a powerful God, Romero met the self-emptying, self-sacrificing God in the midst of his beloved people, a God who becomes poor, oppressed, accepting the fate of the crucified people of history.

It is a conversion of mind and heart that we are all invited to make this Lent. The story of the poor man Lazarus, lying hungry and destitute at the rich man’s doorstep, warns us that the gap we put between ourselves and our suffering brothers and sisters in this world might be preserved in eternity. If we do not recognize, know and love God in the poor now, will we recognize God when we come face to face with the Divine Mystery at the judgment?

Luke’s story, like the call to serve the poor in Jesus’ parable of the last judgment in Matthew 25, is not just a call to help the poor, but a call to save our own lives by seeing God in the least of our brothers and sisters. The greatest poverty is a heart empty of compassion or eyes that can no longer see someone in need.

Romero came alive in a new and deeper way because of his relationship with the poor in El Salvador. He is both a saint and a martyr because he now witnesses to all of us that this is the path to life, the one place we are bound to find God, in this world and in the next.