

Raised to the altars: one who fell for the poor



Romero, the late Archbishop of San Salvador, was a fearless defender of the poor. He was assassinated by a right-wing death squad while celebrating Mass in 1980 as his country began to descend into civil war.

At a press conference in San Salvador on Monday, church spokesman Mgr Rafael Urrutia said that among the 300,000 people expected to attend were seven cardinals, 90 bishops – including all the Salvadoran hierarchy – and more than 1,000 priests. Also expected are seven heads of state, including the Presidents of Ecuador and Panama. The bishops of England and Wales will be represented by John Rawsthorne, emeritus bishop of Hallam.

From San Salvador, Julian Filochowski, director of the Romero Trust, told *The Tablet*: “There is a great sense of excitement at what will be an unprecedented event in Salvadoran history, but worry too that the organisation in San Salvador may struggle to cope with a huge influx of pilgrims from the countryside and neighbouring countries.”

Mr Filochowski also referred to concern that local presentations of Romero by the Church and local media “portray a tepid, bland and watered-down version of Romero rather than the martyr for justice”. A particular target for criticism has been the slogan that appears on the official publicity for the beatification, “Romero, martyr for love”. However another official poster adds: “For the poor, for justice, for his people, for the Church, for Jesus Christ”.

But the current archbishop of San Salvador, Archbishop José Luis Escobar, insisted that the beatification “marks a path, establishes a route for living the faith. So when Archbishop Romero is beatified, he is beatified with his doctrine, with his teaching and he becomes a light, a torch to guide the path of the Church... It is important, not only because he is El Salvador’s first Blessed, but also because of Archbishop Romero’s greatness and his example, not just to follow his teaching theoretically but to put it into practice.”

Among initiatives being organised to commemorate the beatification are Romero “wallpaper” for

computers and smart phones and a play, Romero – Path of Justice, which is to be performed in a local theatre and in the chapel of the Divine Providence Hospital, where Romero was murdered.

Relatives and people who knew Romero in his hometown of Ciudad Barrios and in his later posting to the eastern town of San Miguel have been interviewed in local media. Former shoeshine boys in San Miguel, who were beaten by their keepers and forced to sleep in the park, have told how Romero formed them into an association, with official identification, which helped to end the beatings. He later built a hostel and a school for them.

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