



The Holy See

ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS TO THE PILGRIMAGE FROM EL SALVADOR

Sala Regia

Friday, 30 October 2015

[Multimedia]

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate, Authorities, Priests, Men and Women Religious, Seminarians, Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning. I receive your visit today with much joy and, in giving you my most cordial welcome, I also wish to express to you my affection for all the children of the beloved Salvadoran nation. I thank Bishop Jose Luis Escobar, President of the Episcopal Conference, for his kind words. I thank all of you very much for your warm and enthusiastic presence.

Joy has brought you to Rome in recognition of the beatification of Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero, a good shepherd, full of love of God and close to his brothers, and who, living the dynamism of the Beatitudes, went so far as to give his life, in a violent way, while celebrating the Eucharist, the Sacrifice of Supreme Love, sealing with his own blood the Gospel he proclaimed.

From the beginning of the life of the Church, we Christians, persuaded by the words of Christ, who reminds us that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone” (Jn 12:24), have always maintained the conviction that the blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians, as Tertullian said. The blood of a great number of Christians that still today continues to be shed dramatically in the battlefield of the world, with the certain hope that it will bear fruit in an abundant harvest of holiness, of justice, reconciliation and love of God. But let us remember that one is not born a martyr. It is a grace that the Lord grants, and which concerns in a certain way all baptized people. Archbishop Romero recalled: “We must be ready to die for our faith, even if the Lord does not grant us this honour.... Giving one’s life does not only mean being killed; giving one’s life, having the spirit of a martyr, it is in giving in duty, in silence, in prayer, in honest fulfillment of his duty; in that silence of daily life; giving one’s life little by little” (*General Audience*, 7 January 2015).

A martyr, in fact, is not one who remains relegated to the past, a lovely image that adorns our churches and that we remember with a certain nostalgia. No, a martyr is a brother, a sister, who continues to accompany us in the mystery of the communion of saints and who, united to Christ, is not indifferent to our earthly pilgrimage, to our suffering, to our pain. In the recent history of this beloved country, Archbishop Romero's witness has been added to that of other brothers and sisters, such as Fr Rutilio Grande, who, not fearing to lose their life, have won it and have been constituted intercessors of their people before the Living God, who lives forever and ever, and who has in his hands the keys of death and Hades (cf. Rev 1:18). All these brothers and sisters are a treasure and a founded hope for the Church and for Salvadoran society. The impact of their gift of self is still perceived in our day. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, they were configured with Christ, like so many witnesses of the faith of all times.

Dear Salvadoran friends, with only a few weeks before the beginning of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Archbishop Romero's example constitutes for his beloved nation an incentive and a renewed endeavour of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, announcing it in such a way that all people will know it, so that the merciful love of the Divine Saviour may invade the heart and history of its good people. The holy People of God, pilgrimaging in El Salvador, still has ahead of it a series of difficult tasks; it continues to need, as the rest of the world, the evangelizing proclamation that will enable it to witness, in the communion of the one Church of Christ, a genuine Christian life, and that will help it to foster the promotion and development of a nation that seeks true justice, genuine peace and the reconciliation of hearts.

On this occasion, with so much affection for each one of you present here and for all Salvadorans, I make my own the sentiments of Bl. Archbishop Romero, who, with well-founded hope, longed to see the arrival of the happy moment in which the terrible tragedy of the suffering of so many of our brothers and sisters because of hatred, violence and injustice, would disappear from El Salvador. May the Lord, with a shower of mercy and kindness, and with a torrent of graces, convert all hearts and may the beautiful homeland that he has given you, which bears the name of the Divine Saviour, become a country where all feel redeemed and as brothers, without distinction, because we are all one in Christ our Lord (cf. Archbishop Óscar Romero, *Homily in Aguilares*, 19 June 1977).

I would also like to add something that perhaps has escaped us. Archbishop Romero's martyrdom did not occur precisely at the moment of his death; it was a martyrdom of witness, of previous suffering, of previous persecution, until his death. But also afterwards because, after he died — I was a young priest and I witnessed this — he was defamed, slandered, soiled, that is, his martyrdom continued even by his brothers in the priesthood and in the episcopate. I am not speaking from hearsay; I heard those things. In other words, it is nice to see him like this: as a man who continues to be a martyr. I think that now they would no longer say such things. However, after giving his life, he continued to give it, allowing himself to be scourged by all of that misunderstanding and slander. This gives me strength, God only knows. Only God knows the

history of people and how many times people who have already given their life, or who have died, continue to be scourged with the hardest stone that exists in the world: the tongue.

Through the intercession of Our Lady of Peace, whose feast we celebrated a few days ago, I invoke God's blessing upon you and all the dear sons and daughters of this blessed land.

Thank you very much.