

Homily for Fourth Sunday of Lent
March 22, 2009

Introduction

The theme emerging from today's Scripture readings strikes me as entirely evident: sightedness which truly sees.

In the First Reading Samuel is instructed by God not to judge by appearances.

St. Paul then writes to the Christians of Ephesus that they - and we - once were in darkness but are now in the light; in other words blind but now able to see.

And of course in the Gospel Jesus restores sight to a blind person and he readily sees Jesus as a prophet; the Pharisees on the other hand have eyesight but are blind to the Prophet (Jesus) among them.

I

This reflection serves as a direct segue to the anniversary we celebrate on Tuesday, the martyrdom of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador twenty-nine years ago.

We know his story: a churchman who gradually came to see what he had been looking at most of his life - the awful plight of most Salvadorans as they languished under the twin curses of poverty and violence.

Romero's is an unlikely story, but one that uncannily replicates today's Scriptural theme.

-he was a member of the Catholic hierarchy (from where we don't generally expect very much these days),

-he was promoted to the principal diocese of his country, the Archdiocese of San Salvador

-his promotion was received with delight by the repressive forces in El Salvador, the elite "14 Families", who traditionally ruled that country, and their political supporters, the military establishment complete with their death squads

II

But Romero's eyes were opened and he saw. He saw his vocation as spokesperson for the suffering masses of his country.

On Sunday, March 23, 1980 Archbishop Romero spoke these prophetic, insightful and now immortal words to the military of his country: "I ask you, I beg you, I order you, in the name of God stop the repression."

The next day, March 24, 1980 the Archbishop was shot dead at the altar by a member of the military's death squad.

III

Ironically, over these many years we have come to celebrate this anniversary. The tragedy of the Archbishop's assassination has become a shining light. Today at the 1:00 p.m. Mass in Spanish here at Our Lady Queen of Peace our hispanic sisters and brothers will acclaim this bishop-martyr of El Salvador, now called the Saint of the Americas.

But March 24 is not only a happy memory now. It has direct implications for all of us.

Shortly before his martyrdom, Archbishop Romero pleaded with another fairly decent U.S. president, Jimmy Carter, to desist from fomenting the internecine war that was devastating his country. In a letter from "one Christian to another" Romero asked that the United States stop arming the military of El Salvador. But the Carter White House ignored Romero's plea and the war there wore on for another 10 long years, costing some 70,000 lives and ended in a total stalemate.

Romero knew that the war there was futile, just as the Iraq War has been futile, just as the war in Afghanistan is futile.

If only we - all of us from this president to each of us - have the eyes to see in the words of Pope John Paul II "war is a defeat for humanity".

Conclusion

One month before his assassination Archbishop Romero spoke these prescient and prophetic words: "If I die, I shall rise in the Salvadoran people". He has indeed risen today not only in the people of El Salvador but in all the people of the Americas who have eyes to see. Our prayer today, I suggest, on the eve of this great man's anniversary might be that we not only admire Romero's example but acquire his clearsightedness. Or in the words of another blind man whom Jesus healed: "Lord, I want to see".