

Catholic Review Column: Pentecost and Blessed Oscar Romero

This past weekend, our church celebrated two great events: Pentecost, which marks the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus, and the beatification of Archbishop Oscar Romero, who was beatified in San Salvador where he served as archbishop until his assassination in 1980. Not coincidentally, our Holy Father, Pope Francis, chose this day to beatify this priest and bishop who modeled his life on Jesus by opening his heart to the Holy Spirit.

At every moment of his life, Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit - when he was conceived in the womb of Mary, when he was baptized in the Jordan, and even in his death and resurrection. When Jesus was condemned to death, all but one of his disciples abandoned him. After his resurrection, they rejoiced to see the Lord but were still confused and fearful. It was only after the Holy Spirit came upon them that they really understood who Jesus was and what he preached. Only then could they go out and proclaim the name of Jesus without fear. Only then could they liberate minds and hearts from the oppression of sin. Their courageous witness to Jesus cost them their lives, as it would Blessed Oscar Romero.

It's not hard to see how the newly-beatified archbishop modeled his life on Jesus and the Apostles. He was the son of a carpenter, just as Jesus was. He entered the seminary at the age of 13, the same age Jesus was when he was found in the temple with the teachers of the Law of Moses.

He studied in Rome when fascism was on the rise and on his way back from Rome was arrested in Cuba. As a priest and bishop he remained a gentle, prayerful, even quiet man who preached the Gospel, celebrated the sacraments, and tended to the

sick and poor.

Soon after he became the archbishop of San Salvador, his close friend, Jesuit Father Rutilio Grande, was assassinated for helping the poor in El Salvador organize themselves into “self-reliance” groups. Undeterred, Archbishop Romero, filled with the Holy Spirit, became a fearless advocate for the poor and the marginalized. He spoke out publicly against the killing of innocent priests and poor people, against violence, untruths and misinformation, and did not hesitate to speak against the rich and powerful for oppressing the poor.

He promoted economic reforms and other measures to alleviate poverty, and in his preaching showed how Jesus’ truth and love liberates the human spirit. He bore witness to the dignity of the human person and the truth and power of the Catholic Church’s social teachings. His witness to human dignity fully revealed in Christ cost him his life, as he was struck down as he celebrated Mass some 35 years ago.

He asked, “To what truth am I giving my life?” The answer: he gave his life for Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the witness of this holy and courageous pastor lives on today and will for all ages.

In the spirit of Pentecost, let us open our hearts anew to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit we received in the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. Let us ask for the grace to follow Blessed Oscar Romero’s example: to strive to be holy and gentle like Jesus, to be courageous in bearing witness to the faith, generous in serving the poor and the needy, and tireless in working for a peaceful and just society.