

Ties to Romero: Cockeysville parishioners reminisce, prepare for Blessed Romero's canonization

COCKEYSVILLE - A tenth-grader in El Salvador in March of 1980, Edgar Ruano remembers the moment he heard then-Archbishop Oscar Romero had been shot and killed.

"I thought he was untouchable - a lot of people didn't believe," said Ruano, a parishioner of St. Joseph in Cockeysville. "Just like you remember 9/11, it's one of those days. You remember it forever."

St. Joseph is among the parishes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore with a strong Hispanic presence that have great anticipation of the Oct. 15 canonization of Blessed Oscar Romero, who is to become the first saint from El Salvador.

Ruano said Blessed Romero's canonization will further spread his story.

"He gave his life to spread Jesus' message," said Ruano, after 7 p.m. Spanish Mass at St. Joseph Sept. 15. "You have to have that courage, that fortitude, to do that. It doesn't come easy, it just doesn't."

Ruano recalled attending Divine Providence Elementary School in San Salvador during the late 1970s, and making monthly visits to the hospital of the same name to sing with his youth choir for Masses celebrated by Blessed Romero.

Ruano, around 10 years old at the time, recalled Blessed Romero visiting with him and the other students after Mass.

“He was very approachable,” Ruano said, adding that he was disappointed when then-Archbishop Romero was not able to come to his church for his confirmation a few years later. “I never got to see him again, but he made an impact on my life.”

Ruano grew emotional while talking about Blessed Romero.

“When people ask you, ‘Who do you look up to?’ that’s who I look up to,” Ruano said. “I know he’s a holy man.”

Helman Ar-gueta, a parishioner of St. Joseph for approximately three years, also has a personal connection to Blessed Romero – they both hail from Ciudad Barrios, in the western half of the Central American country.

Argueta recalled visiting the cathedral where Archbishop Romero celebrated Mass. Later, Argueta would visit the chapel where, while presiding over a Mass March 24, 1980, Blessed Romero was assassinated.

“I am very proud that we are going to have a saint from El Salvador,” Argueta said through the translation of Ruano. “By his dying, he has become the light of this nation.”

Blessed Romero was assassinated after making several public denunciations of violence against civilians in the Central American nation. He had spoken out against injustice toward the poor that led to a conflict that would last 12 years and leave more than 70,000 dead.

He was beatified May 23, 2015, and will be canonized alongside Blessed Paul VI, the pope who named him as the leader of the San Salvador Archdiocese in 1977.

St. Joseph will hold a vigil after the 7 p.m. Spanish Mass Oct. 13 in Blessed Romero’s honor.

Catholic News Service contributed to this article.