

Assembly Notes

St Oscar Romero

A missionary of God's love



SLIDE ONE – HOLDING SLIDE

LEADER'S NOTES

This presentation lasts up to 20 minutes. **We recommend you deliver the whole assembly but feel free to use the slides and script as time and circumstances allow. To reduce time, omit extension tasks.**



***For this assembly you will need: 3-4 bars of chocolate**

***Begin the assembly with the following activity to introduce the theme of injustice**

Explain to the year group / class that before you start this morning's assembly you are delighted to announce that the Head Teacher has chosen to gift the year / class group with 200 free bars of chocolate, as a reward for recent efforts. Explain that you have some bars with you and the rest are in your office. Tell pupils that rather than share them out with everyone as instructed, you are going to select those you wish to share the chocolate with. Hand out the bars to a few members of staff and explain that you'll divide the rest with the staff later.

If some students challenge or act aggrieved inform them that you have the authority to allocate rewards as you like, but that they will have opportunity to challenge your decision in a few minutes.

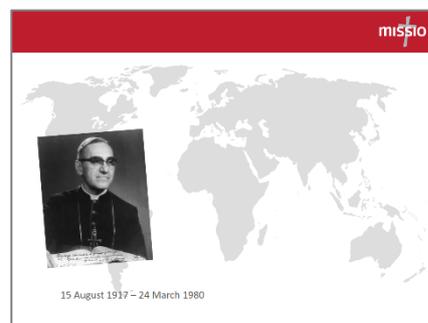
Continue with the assembly as if your distribution was fair behaviour.

SLIDE TWO

Today we are going to be focusing on the man whose image we can see here on the screen. Can anybody tell us who this is?

St Oscar Romero.

St Romero was Archbishop in El Salvador in the 1970s, at a time of great unfairness and conflict, when a small group of very rich people – members of the government, military, police, and big business - controlled the country's money and power.



[Click to reveal graphic.](#)

This small and wealthy group took advantage of their situation by **exploiting El Salvador's poor**. As the rich owned almost all the country's property, they could set high rents knowing farmers and families, unable to buy their own land, had no option but to pay. Rich business leaders and government officials also kept wages low and the cost of living high. Meaning that, no matter how hard ordinary Salvadorans worked, they were left with very little money, even though they made up the majority of the population.

Imagine you were one of the many poor Salvadorans caught in this unfair situation?

- How do you think you would have felt?
- What might you have done to try and improve the situation?

Some of you may have felt angry and wanted to protest.

[Click to reveal protest photo.](#)

But in 1970s El Salvador, protests were quickly and violently crushed by the wealthy and powerful. Poor Salvadorans caught protesting were arrested, often tortured, sometimes killed.

There were very few people brave enough to speak out against the growing injustice.

SLIDE THREE

Then along came Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Once again imagine you are an ordinary poor Salvadorian and take a good look at Archbishop Romero.

- Does he look like he could be your hero?
- Do you think he looks brave enough to stand up against injustice and violence?



[Click to reveal a hero image.](#)

Romero did not look like a typical hero and some allowed this to influence their opinion of him.

Extension task – Hands up if you think this judgement was fair?

Judging Archbishop Romero on his appearance may seem wrong to many of us, but **how often do we** judge people based on their appearance? Maybe this is something we can start to be aware of, reminding ourselves to look beyond the surface and for the best in others.

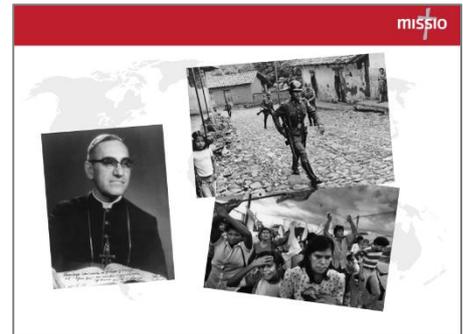
As well as his appearance, many also judged Romero on his past behaviour. Before he was made Archbishop, Romero had showed himself to be cautious and fearful of speaking out.

Based on this, many expected that he would do nothing to challenge injustice and defend the poor, especially as the violence in El Salvador grew worse day by day.

SLIDE FOUR

But as often is the case when we judge by appearances or reject people because of their past, Archbishop Romero proved his critics wrong.

Motivated by his faith in Christ and guided by the Gospel, Romero opened his eyes to see the injustices around him, he opened his ears to hear the cries of the poor, and opened his heart to God's call that he help to build, with the people, God's kingdom in El Salvador.



This doesn't mean Romero instructed Salvadorians to build a palace. God's kingdom isn't a physical place. It is not built with bricks and timber.

God's kingdom is built through our relationship with God and others. In this kingdom people recognise their identity as a child of God and live as Christ showed us, creating together a world marked by justice, mercy and peace.

SLIDE FIVE

To encourage all Salvadorans, poor and rich, **to build God's kingdom together**, Romero began speaking out.

To reach everyone in the country, he cleverly used the social media of his day, the radio.

At that time, before the internet and mobile phones, the radio was the primary means by which El Salvadorans learned about what was happening in the country. So Romero began broadcasting a special prayer service every Sunday.

In this service he would read out passages from the Bible that spoke of justice, mercy and peace. And he would remind people that all **humans are made in God's image and likeness**, and so **have in-built dignity that is more precious than money and worthy of honour that can't be bought**.

Following the example of Jesus, Romero saw the image of God in everyone, rich or poor, oppressor or oppressed. And following the commandment of Jesus, to **'Love others, just as I have loved you'** (John13:34), Romero was prepared to give his life so that others might live theirs to the full.

That is why Romero could deliver very brave messages that directly challenged the powerful and so put him in great danger. Messages like,



[Click to reveal](#)

'It is not God's will for some to have everything and others to have nothing.'

Extension task

- What do you think of this quotation?
- Do you agree with the statement?
- Do you think this still happens? That some still have everything and others have nothing?

Some students may refer back to the unfair decision of the teacher/leader to distribute the gifted chocolate to a chosen few. If nobody does this, then lead students with the following...

At the start of this assembly I took a decision to hand out chocolate to a chosen few. But my instruction had been to share the chocolate with everyone as a reward for everyone's efforts.

As you may have guessed, no free bars of chocolate have been given by the Head Teacher. This was just a way to help us appreciate how frustrating it is to be treated unfairly and have your rights ignored by a more powerful group. But if the chocolate really did exist,

- Was my decision fair?
- Did anyone here challenge it?

IF YES:

Well done. Even if you were prevented from bringing about a change at that time, you highlighted the fact that my actions were unjust. You were right to speak out.

The Church teaches that as the Body of Christ on earth, we should always act in solidarity with the poor. That means all people working together to bring about change that benefits all.

Just as St Romero did.

IF NO:

Why didn't you speak out? At times we may feel that injustice can't be changed because some issues are too big. Or that's just the way things are.

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SLIDE SIX

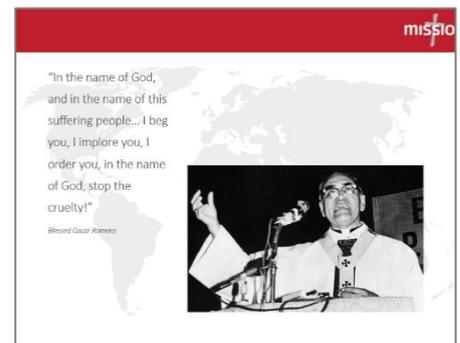
During his time as Archbishop of El Salvador, things became more violent and unfair. After thousands of protestors had been killed, the poor became violent in turn.

They accessed guns and fighting broke out between the poor and the powerful.

Romero spoke out against all violence, whether committed by the powerful or by poor protestors. Following the example of Jesus, he tried desperately to promote mercy and peace.

By speaking out so boldly Romero annoyed many people. He knew his life was at risk. On Sunday March 23rd 1980 he broadcast a very brave sermon in which he **ordered** the killings to stop.

Some feared Romero had gone too far. The next day, whilst he was saying mass in a small hospital chapel, Romero was shot dead. An assassin's bullet hit him in the heart, killing him immediately.



SLIDE SEVEN

Today, across the world, there are priests, nuns, and church members, who like Romero, have committed their lives to sharing Christ's love with others, whatever the risk.

The Pope's charity Missio, helps these brave people in their work, by asking its supporters to pray and share, so that the Church might continue to build God's kingdom on earth. Romero knew Missio well, as he managed the charity in El Salvador before he was made Archbishop.



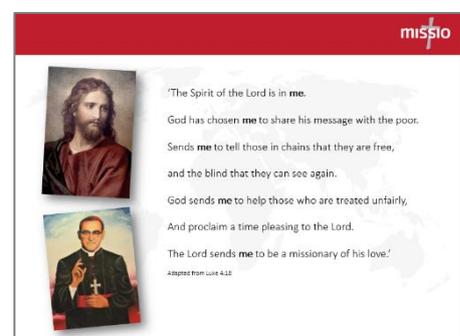
SLIDE EIGHT

St Oscar Romero shared the love of Christ with everyone. He did this through his words and actions. This makes him a great example of a missionary, someone who delivers God's love to all. And it helps us see how we can be missionaries too, in our families, school, and world.

How might you do this?

In what ways can you share God's love this week?

- We can be missionaries is by treating people with dignity, remembering that all are made in God's image. Judging not on appearance or overlooking their potential.



- We could support the Pope's charity Missio, and so help build God's kingdom, especially in areas of injustice and conflict.
- We can pray for others and, like St Romero and Jesus, ask God for the courage and wisdom to share love in our world, today.

Let's finish by saying a prayer. It is based on a reading from the Bible that was a favourite of Jesus and St Romero. Let's say this out loud together.

[Click to reveal](#)

'The Spirit of the Lord is in me.

God has chosen me to share his message with the poor.

Sends me to tell those in chains that they are free,

and the blind that they can see again.

God sends me to help those who are treated unfairly,

And proclaim a time pleasing to the Lord.

The Lord sends me to be a missionary of his love.'

Adapted from Luke 4:18