

Workshop Notes

Blessed Oscar Romero: A missionary of God's love



SLIDE ONE – HOLDING SLIDE

LEADER'S NOTES

This workshop lasts up to 40 minutes. **We recommend you deliver the whole workshop but feel free to use the slides and script as time and circumstances allow. To reduce time, omit extension tasks.**

***For this workshop you will need 3-4 bars of chocolate (any size)**

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

Tell the year group / class that before you start this morning's session, you are delighted to announce that the Head Teacher has chosen to gift the year group / class 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 any students challenge you or are 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 workshop 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?

Blessed Oscar Romero.

Can anyone explain why, 38 years after his death, Blessed Romero is still loved across the world and is soon to be made a saint?



Blessed 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 people**. As they 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. As a result, 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 the 1970s in 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 Salvadoran 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 this influenced some people's opinion of him.

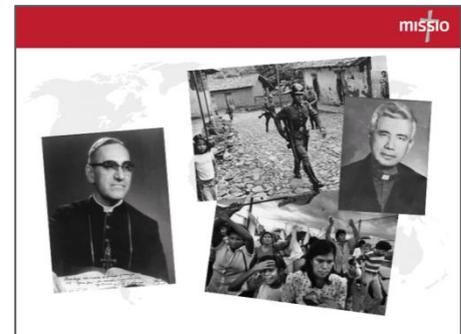
Extension task: Hands up if you think this judgement was fair. Judging Archbishop Romero on his appearance may seem wrong to many of us, but **how often do we judge** people based on their appearance? Maybe this is something we can start to be aware of, reminding ourselves to look beyond the surface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

As well as his appearance, some people also judged Romero on his past behaviour. Before he was made Archbishop, Romero had shown himself to be cautious and fearful of speaking out. Based on this, many expected that he would do nothing to challenge injustice and defend poor people, especially as the violence in El Salvador grew worse day by day.

SLIDE FOUR

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

Following the murder of his close friend, Father Rutilio Grande (pictured), who was assassinated for defending poor Salvadorans, and motivated by his faith in Christ, Romero opened his eyes to see the injustices around him, opened his ears to hear the cries of the poor, and opened his heart to God's call to help to build God's kingdom, with the people, in El Salvador.



This doesn't mean Romero instructed Salvadorans 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 a world together that is 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 Salvadorans learned about what was happening in the country. So Romero decided to broadcast the mass he celebrated in the capital each Sunday to the nation. In this mass Romero would highlight passages from the Bible that spoke of justice, mercy and peace, and he would pray for all Salvadoran protestors killed the previous week, naming each individually.

Romero used his broadcast to remind people that **all humans are made in God's image and likeness**, so they **have in-built dignity that is more precious than money and are worthy of honour that must not be ignored.**



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 one another, just as I have loved you'** (John 13:34), 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 quotation.](#)

'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 your unfair decision to distribute the gifted chocolate to a chosen few. If nobody does this, then lead students with the following...

At the start of this workshop 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, the Head Teacher hasn't given out 200 free bars of chocolate. 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? Was it just?
- 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 which benefits all, just as 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. Or perhaps we are too scared?

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 which benefits all, just as Romero did.

SLIDE SIX

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

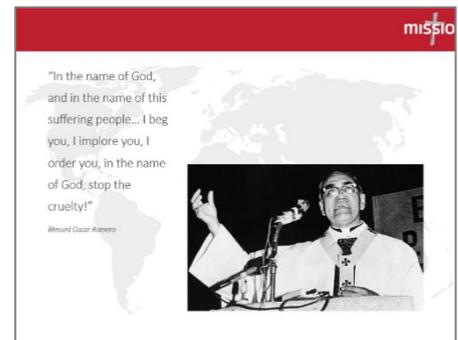
They accessed guns and fighting broke out between the poor and the powerful.

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 23 March 1980 he broadcast a very brave sermon in which he ordered the killings to stop.

'In the name of God, and in the name of this suffering people... I beg you, I implore you, I order you, in the name of God, stop the cruelty!'

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

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 by treating people with dignity, remembering that we are all made in God's image; not judging on appearance or overlooking people's potential.

We could support the Pope's charity, Missio, and so help build God's kingdom, especially in those parts of the world where there is injustice and conflict.

We can pray for others and, like Romero and Jesus, ask God our Father 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 scripture that was a favourite of Jesus and Romero. **Let's say this out loud together.**

[Click to reveal prayer.](#)

'The Spirit of the Lord is within me.

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

God sends me to tell those in chains that they are free,

and to help those who struggle to see a way forward.

God sends me to support those who are treated unfairly,

And to proclaim a time pleasing to the Lord.

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

Amen.

(Adapted from Luke 4:18)