

'Monseñor' Oscar Romero:

Death failed to silence his call for justice

By Teresa A. Parsons

He was, in his own words, a man of peace. But it was his violent death six years ago, that gained Oscar Arnulfo Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador, the world's attention.

Fatefully, he was remembered this year on Palm Sunday, at the same time when Christians commemorate another agitator and "blasphemer against the state," whose call for justice created a stir among the people.

Close to 50 people gathered Sunday, March 23, at St. Anthony of Padua Church in Rochester to celebrate an interfaith service marking the sixth anniversary of Archbishop Romero's death. A coffin carried into the sanctuary of St. Anthony's was a vivid reminder of Archbishop Romero's murder on March 24, 1980, when he was shot by four gunmen before more than 100 horrified onlookers as he celebrated Mass in the chapel of Divine Providence Hospital in San Salvador.

After Sunday's service, participants walked in a silent, candlelight procession to Lake Avenue Baptist Church, which last week was declared by its congregation as a sanctuary for those in whose behalf Archbishop Romero worked and died.

Speakers used the opportunity to recall the sacrifice of other victims of violence in Central America. "The blood of martyrs, well-known and unknown, flows in our veins. We are called to witness less their blood be forgotten," said Father John Mulligan, pastor of St. Anthony's. "We ask the strength to replicate the sacrifice of the martyrs of Central America ... to remember that there is no justice at all until there is justice for all."

Prior to his elevation to archbishop, the Monsenor, as Romero is affectionately known in El Salvador, was an unlikely champion of the oppressed. From 1974-77, he was the relatively unknown bishop of Santiago de Maria. When he was appointed by the Vatican in 1977 to replace the retiring Archbishop of San Salvador, Chavez y Gonzalez, many reacted with disappointment.

"It's all over," one Central American Jesuit was quoted as saying at the time. "The Vatican doesn't know what's happening here."

What has been termed "the conversion" of the Monsenor, from conservative to advocate of land reform and denouncer of terrorism and violence, happened during his tenure at Santiago de Maria, where he witnessed firsthand the struggle of peasants to organize against government repression.

Shortly after he was named, the archbishop spoke out against fraudulent presidential elections, against killings, torture and re-



Isabel Morrison, from Downtown United Presbyterian Church, shields her candle from the wind during a candlelight vigil held Sunday, March 23, in memory of Bishop Oscar Romero. The service began at St. Anthony of Padua Church, and proceeded to Lake Avenue Baptist Church.

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THE CLAMOUR FOR JUSTICE AMONG THE PEOPLE THEY CANNOT SILENCE

pression by both right and left-wing groups, and against the disappearance of hundreds of political opponents of the government.

"Yes, I have changed," he admitted. "Before, I was different — more spiritualistic, I guess you would say — because that was what I thought the Lord wanted of me. Here the situation is very different, and so my response has to be very different. Our people are poor and oppressed and they are being tortured."

Consequently, he was called a communist

and traitor by the government, and became the target of death threats by right-wing death squads.

"They can kill me, but the clamor for justice among the people they cannot silence," the archbishop responded. "I will rise again in my people."

Even his fellow bishops termed his efforts as "encouragement to communist elements bent on manipulating the Church and overthrowing our constitutional government."

Monsenor Romero was nominated for the 1979 Nobel Peace Prize, but never believed he would receive it. "The nomination itself is the prize for me. I would accept it not for myself, but as an award to the cause of human rights. This is what sustains me — my love for God, my desire to be faithful to the gospels, and my love for the Salvadoran people, particularly the poor," he said.

Father Charles Mulligan, recently returned from sabbatical in South and Central America, assessed the current situation in El Salvador by recalling a letter he received from a correspondent there.

"She wrote to me about the war coming to the next-door village. She said one of the first things that they do is they set land mines. And one of the first things that happen is the children get into the land mines," he said.

"We are so massive and so powerful and have such grand concerns that I think we have no room for children and land mines as an issue."

He concluded by calling participants to renewed dedication in their work for justice. "Let's act, and let's act with hope. Let's make it our very lives to live with hope," he said. "We have wonderful efforts, painstakingly constructed, by people that have built signs of hope right here in this room ... Remember that the hope and the light that we have does not depend on the circumstances around us."

Black Church Conference

The 10th annual Mordecai Wyatt Johnson Institute of Religion will be held at Colgate Rochester Divinity School and the Trinity Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, Rochester, April 1-4. Each day's session will include morning and evening worship services held at the Divinity School at 11:20 a.m. and at Trinity Emmanuel Presbyterian Church at 8

p.m. Workshops will be held at 6:30 p.m., preceding each evening's preaching service. The keynote address will be delivered on Friday morning, April 4, at 9:30, and the conference will close with a choir concert at 7:30 p.m. at the Divinity School. It is free and open to the public.

AQUINAS INSTITUTE THEN AND NOW

A series of articles to appear semi-monthly commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the school.

When the Board of Trustees voted to open Aquinas to the St. Agnes girls, it was heralded as a "first" in the school's history. However, a chronicle of the Institute reveals that females constituted a significant number of the student population when the school opened in 1902. They remained until 1917 when, following a Church directive on the need to segregate the sexes for better education, the school became all boys.

In 1983, the Board voted open enrollment, making it possible for any young lady to attend Aquinas. Graduation ceremonies that year were indeed historic: the first female graduates of Aquinas in fifty years received their diplomas from the first female Board President, Mrs. Kathleen Lynd.

Traditional activities — Drama Club, Band and Cheerleading — formerly dependent on other schools for female participation, now feature our own students. Band membership has increased and with the addition of the all-girl Color Guard, the Band has achieved new status in competition.

School spirit is much in evidence on the Cheerleading squads. Loretta Vaccaro says, "It's fun to cheer for a school whose teams are well-known, especially football and now, basketball!"

With the girls representing one-third of the student population, there is excellent opportunity for them to participate actively in all aspects of the school's life. Jackie Mejia, Student Council Secretary says, "Because of the family spirit atmosphere, social relationships are easy to develop. The girls feel relaxed in class with the boys and compete with them on an equal basis. That's the real world. When we receive that diploma from a school with a 60 year tradition of academic excellence for men, we know we've got something worthwhile!"

Girls' athletic programs are essentially the same as the boys'. Fall of '86 will see an all-girl swim team for the first time at Aquinas.

Mary Beth Moore, teacher and coach, says "Girls have a better chance of making teams by virtue of their number. Each has an opportunity to expand her talents. Freshmen girls benefit because they play on a Varsity team immediately! A unique facility open to girls is Bell Fieldhouse featuring a weight room and workout equipment.

Everyone agrees girls have made a difference at Aquinas!

NEXT ISSUE: Priest-Vocation from Aquinas.

Paid for by Aquinas Institute

Lodge on the Green advertisement for a Romantic Country Weekend. Includes details about dining, champagne, and skiing. Price is \$98.95 per couple. Reservations required.

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