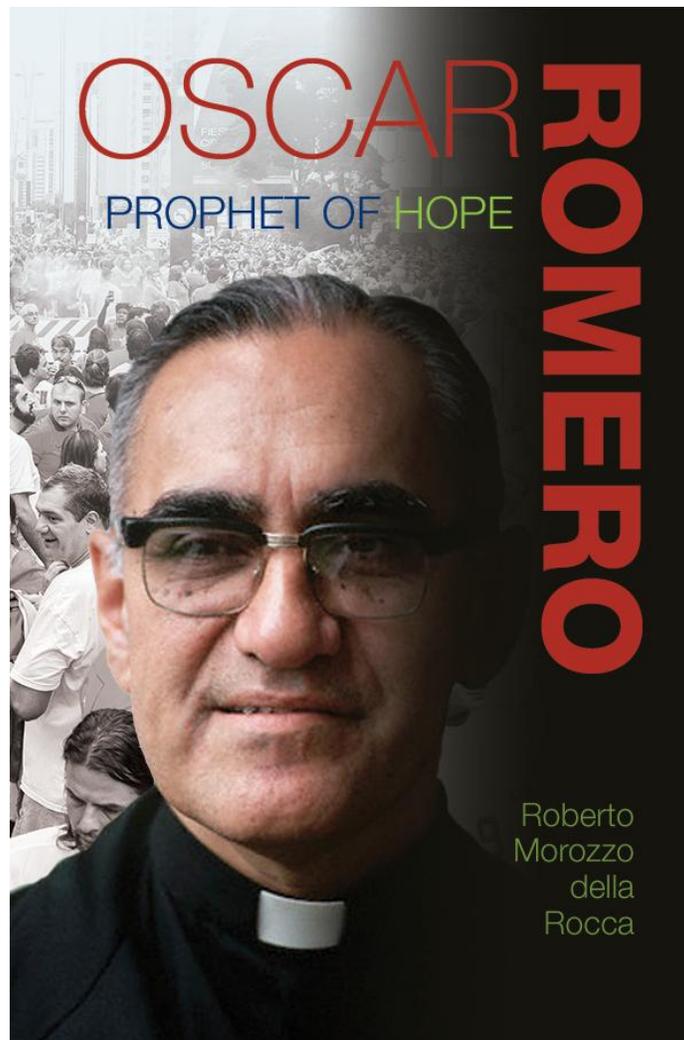


# Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope

***Supplement for Book Clubs and Parish Groups***

*Includes key takeaways from each chapter followed by questions to stimulate discussion*



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You can purchase *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope* [here](#).

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*Foreword (by Hosffman Ospino) and Preface (by Andrea Riccardi)—The Life of Oscar Romero*

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“Romero’s story is a major episode in a country that went through terrible years. It shows how a bishop and a Church can be a haven of peace while everything is collapsing under the blows of senseless violence.” (p. xvii)

Written by historian Roberto Morozzo della Rocca, who worked with the postulator for Oscar Romero’s cause for beatification, this biography provides both credibility and authenticity in looking at the archbishop’s life while stripping away ideological agendas many have attached to him.

1. Had you heard of Blessed Oscar Romero before reading this book? What did you know about the situation in El Salvador in the 1970s?
2. Why do you think Catholics need to study the lives of persons such as Archbishop Romero?
3. How does God work through the lives of the saints and martyrs? Have you been touched in some way, perhaps by praying for a saint’s intercession?

*Chapter One—The First Fifty Years*

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“To put it simply, Romero wanted to be holy” (p. 8). His years of formation in Rome on the eve of World War II gave Romero a spiritual grounding in both Christian perfection and in the importance of connection with Rome.

Back in El Salvador, he developed a concern for the poor; his indifference to money earned him detractors. He understood the Second Vatican Council as a return to the Gospel and recognized the Church was being called to an “obsession for Christ” (p. 26).

1. What did holiness mean to Oscar Romero? What does it mean to you?
2. How do you think he experienced life in San Miguel after spending years in the heart of the Church in Rome?
3. What did Romero mean by “obsession for Christ”? Is that something that we are called to live out in our lives as well? If so, what might it look like?

*Chapter Two—El obispo que van a tener es pastor*

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Many Salvadoran bishops supported the current stable military government, but liberation theology was becoming popular and Romero clearly associated liberation with salvation. He believed that it couldn’t be concerned exclusively with earthly realities—true liberation is from sin and not just from an oppressive social situation.

Seeing poverty, sickness, unemployment, alcoholism, and illiteracy, he increased the number of charitable projects sponsored by the diocese and protested against landowners not paying a fair wage. He struggled with the murders of civilians at the hands of the military as well as the role of a bishop in defending his priests.

When he became archbishop of San Salvador, Romero entered a situation fraught with conflict: dramatic social inequities and the rise of both paramilitary and guerilla groups—many of the latter being Catholic.

1. What was Romero's struggle of conscience around the Lor Naranjos training center for rural catechists? How do you feel about how he resolved it?
2. How might the Lord be calling you to have compassion for the sufferings of others? Who in your community is in need of your spiritual or material help and support?
3. How did the Church lose the support of the government and the wealthy? Do you think it was inevitable?

### *Chapter Three—Archbishop of San Salvador*

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Not long after Romero became archbishop, violence escalated into a massacre of repression of popular protests. When Romero's friend Fr. Rutilio Grande was murdered, his death had profound repercussions on the archbishop's subsequent thinking and actions.

Government troops went to Grande's village, murdered civilians, arrested and beat the priests, and desecrated the church and the Blessed Sacrament. This finally convinced Romero of the Church's persecution and the barbarism of the oligarchy. As he learned about more killings, disappearances, and episodes of torture, and as the establishment blamed the Church more and more, Romero pushed for unity and dialogue—not as a political program but for spiritual advancement.

1. Fr. Rutilio Grande's murder caused Oscar Romero to question his mission. Why? What made it a turning-point for the new archbishop?
2. Romero cited Pius XI from the pulpit: "When politics touches the altar, the Church defends the altar." Was the persecution of the Church different in El Salvador in the 20<sup>th</sup> century than it was in Rome in the first century? How and why—or why not?
3. Romero's friends say that his conversion was gradual rather than sudden, that it was an issue of faith development. How do people come to change their positions over time on fundamental questions like these? Have you experienced such a change in your life?

## *Chapter Four—Faith and Politics*

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In the base communities (which Romero viewed as similar to early house-churches), faith necessitated political involvement. Some people interpreted this as calling for guerilla action, which in turn caused paramilitary reprisals. An atmosphere of constant emergency prevailed.

Romero defended the people's right to be politically active and/or participate in labor unions; he wanted justice for all, especially the poor, with the kingdom of God starting on earth.

1. Why did “base communities” flourish in Latin America? Can you imagine them working anywhere else?
2. Romero said that the Church should be the conscience of society. Do you agree or disagree? Why? How can that manifest?
3. In view of his commitment to the people of God, did Romero have a real choice in mixing faith with politics? Why or why not?

## *Chapter Five—Sentir con la Iglesia*

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Romero was convinced that a general conversion of all the people, rich and poor, would solve society's inequities, and he placed a special emphasis on forgiveness. Like Pope Francis in our day, he lived humbly; his personal life and needs were simple; he loved to be with ordinary people and experience their joys. The media saw him as the new David taking on Goliath and depicted Romero as an opposition leader, often excluding the religious dimension of his words and actions; some of his “quotes” may even have been fabricated.

His goal was to end the violence in El Salvador through social justice so that the faithful of the Church could live in peace, security, and some measure of prosperity. Although some found Romero's teaching and decisions difficult or controversial, he saw himself as consistently supporting the Church's teachings and traditions.

1. Romero identified himself clearly as the bishop of the poor. In this way, he was anticipating Pope Francis. How does poverty connect with holiness?
2. Romero said that it was his “destiny to go gathering corpses.” How can we persevere in our faith when we are surrounded by violence and lack of care and charity?
3. Romero felt that the goals of liberation theology were already present in the Beatitudes. How can living the Beatitudes help you find the freedom to which Christ calls you? How can the Beatitudes guide you in caring for the spiritual and physical needs of your neighbors?

## *Chapter Six—Romero and Rome*

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Throughout his priesthood and episcopate, Romero struggled with difficulties in relating to other members of the clergy and hierarchy. He was counseled by Pope John Paul II to work for unity among the bishops of El Salvador, a challenging task which Romero tried to undertake.

1. Unity in the Church is something that even saints have struggled with. How do you experience the reality of factions and divisions in the Church?
2. Jesus prayed that we might be one. How might the Lord be calling you to foster unity in my parish, your family, your place of work or school?
3. There were many who disagreed strongly with Romero and his style of leadership. How do you deal with those with whom you disagree, perhaps even passionately? How do you handle the criticism of others? How might the Lord be calling you to live these situations?

## *Chapter Seven—Romero's Final Days*

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By 1979 El Salvador was becoming more and more violent. The military, death squads, leftist guerillas, and a nascent civil war all plunged the country into bloodshed; Romero condemned both sides for their use of violence and tried to establish himself as a mediator. He was tormented by the spread of repression and violence. For the Church, he believed, “what matters in the various political situations are the poor people” (p. 149).

In a time when Pope Francis is again calling for us to care for the poor, Romero's stand becomes a beacon of hope and his martyrdom a sign of courage and steadfastness in the face of violence, fear, and repression.

1. Romero's assassination took place during Mass. After having read the story of his life, what kind of significance does this moment of his death have for you?
2. The martyrdom of Oscar Romero was certainly a tragic and violent act. Why do you think the Church honors the memory of those who died for the faith? Why is martyrdom important?
3. Romero's mission was a product of his time and place; this may make him difficult for us to understand. What virtues and qualities can you draw from how he lived and died?

## *Conclusions*

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The author writes, “A political myth has developed about Romero. It has not helped to overcome the prejudices of those who regarded him as a rabble-rouser, a subversive, a fanatic who became a media success (...) The myth locked Romero up in the box of the ideological conflicts of his era” (p.166).

Romero saw himself as a man of God and a man of prayer. He did not believe himself to be a hero, a martyr, or a saint; but today we can see him as all three. He did not desire the downfall of anyone, but worked to unify people and stem the violence shredding the lives of his beloved poor.

1. Why is the title of this book “Prophet of Hope”?
2. As Blessed Oscar Romero’s Cause for sainthood moves forward, how might you ask his intercession for you? For what causes might you pray?
3. Has this book given you a balanced view of a man living in a complex time and situation?

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As you wrap up your book club or parish group study of *Oscar Romero: Prophet of Hope*, please know that each one of you is in the prayers of the Daughters of St. Paul. May God be with you and bless you, always!

