

Archbishop Romero once said: *“Do you want to know if your Christianity is genuine? Here is the touchstone: Whom do you get along with? Who are those who criticize you? Who are those who do not accept you? Who are those who flatter you?”* That is a provocative plumbline against which we are invited to measure our own faith. If someone accused St. Francis Church in Holden of being Christian, is there any evidence to convict us? Or does our faith merely mirror the dominant culture of the world in which we live?

Most of you here tonight already know something about Oscar Romero; and those who don't can read the little biography from *Holy Women, Holy Men*. My guess is that no one here could name the martyrs of El Salvador whom we also remember tonight, but I want to be sure they, too, are remembered by name: Ita Ford, Maura Clark, Dorothy Kazel, Jean Donovan, Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Segundo Montes, Arnando Lopez, Joaquin Lopez y Lopez, Juan Ramon Moreno, Julia Elba Ramos and her daughter, Cecilia Ramos, who was just 15. All murdered in cold blood by the death squads.

Ellacuria, a Jesuit priest who was superior of the community at the University of Central America once said: "the struggle against injustice and the pursuit of truth cannot be separated , nor can one work for one independent of the other."

I think that the Book of Revelation is best read and more readily understood from a place like El Salvador than in the so-called “first world.” Hearing those words tonight from the seventh chapter of Revelation gives us the right interpretive clues to comprehending its true purpose: not as a prediction of the end of human history, but as a word of encouragement and hope in the present tense.

It was written at a time when the Church was being threatened, a time when the first-century Christians in Asia Minor were tempted to let fear paralyze them, a time when it was easy to be neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. (Rev. 3:15) Trusting that the lamb on the throne really is “king of kings and lord of lords,” the seer of Patmos encourages those who seek justice and peace against the despots of this world to keep the faith and to hold fast to what is good. It looked like Rome had all the power. The truth was, however, that Rome was declining. Despotic rulers in danger of losing their power become more and more ruthless; we've seen this again in Libya of late. Only when we step back and take the long view, can we truly trust that “all will be well” and refocus our energies on doing the work that God has given us to do.

But in the midst of it all, sometimes those who want to put their trust in the Lamb can feel weak and tired and vulnerable; it's easy to lose heart. Revelation is about encouraging the faithful, even those called to martyrdom, to keep their eyes on the prize.

Those whom we remember today, Archbishop Romero and the martyrs of El Salvador—those whom we have named and the scores of others who were disappeared—bear witness to the promise that the truth really will set us free, even when that truth is hard to swallow.

I don't believe for a second that our friends in El Salvador are "better Christians" than we are. But I do believe that they are trying to be faithful in a much harder context, a far more dangerous context. To preach the gospel there, with or without words, puts them at risk. This day reminds us, however, that the death squads never get the final word. God does.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God,
and worship him day and night within his temple,
and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.
They will hunger no more, and thirst no more;
the sun will not strike them,
nor any scorching heat;
for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

(Revelation 7:7-13)