

Oscar Romero

Curriculum links: RE

- Students explore how contextual understandings of scriptural texts are applied in contemporary religious and social scenarios.
- Students investigate the contribution of individuals and groups within and beyond the Christian tradition in promoting just ways of acting.
- Students know and understand that Jesus calls his Church to promote social justice.
- Students apply understandings of Church social teaching to argue a proposal for a just response to a contemporary issue.
- Students develop and implement strategies to promote just ways of acting in their community.

Activity one: Getting to know Romero

- Ask students what they know (if anything) about El Salvador and about Oscar Romero.
- Read the *Oscar Romero Bio* from the 'Be More Challenge' section of our schools pages or watch clips from the film *Romero* (Four Seasons Entertainment, Paulinist Pictures). NB. *Romero* is rated PG13 and includes scenes of physical violence. It is 1 hour 35 minutes long.
- As students watch the film or read the biography, ask them to write six questions using the question words: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- Let students research the answers to their questions, using the internet.
- Together, share what students have found out. Check that students now understand something of the situation in which Romero lived: majority living in poverty; rich and powerful elite maintaining the status quo; murders, disappearances and oppression. Draw out that Romero stood up for human life and dignity despite the political attitudes of his time.

Activity two: Scripture

- Allow students to pick a scripture text at random out of a hat. Challenge them to a) rewrite it in their own words b) give one example of how someone might act on that text if they were living in an unjust society where the rich and powerful were forcing poor people to remain poor and killing those who resisted. Texts to use: Ex.23:6-7; Ps. 82:2-4; Prov.16:18-20; Amos 8:4-7; Micah 6:8; Matt. 5:2-10; Matt. 10:42; Matt.25:44-45; Lk.4:18-19; Lk.12:4-7; James 2:1-4.
- Share some of the students' answers.
- Remind students of Romero's life. Together identify which of these texts he lived out, and how.

Activity three: Catholic Social Teaching

- Explain that Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is Church teaching that uses scripture to interpret the 'signs of the times' (Pope Paul VI, *On the Development of Peoples, Populorum Progressio*, 1967, 13) and to clarify how the Gospel can be lived in the face of different social challenges.
- Ask students to match CST key principles to the scripture texts already used and to parts of Romero's life (see table below).
- Discuss answers and together identify how Romero lived Catholic Social Teaching.
- Challenge students to create a poster or write a newspaper report that promotes the stand Romero might take on a major social issue today, presenting ideas attractively and creatively. Provide copies of Romero quotations (below) that they may wish to use in their article or poster.

| Key principles of Catholic Social Teaching | Scripture texts | Romero's life |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| <p>Human Dignity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every human being is created in the image and likeness of God and so has inherent dignity. • Poverty, hunger and injustice prevent people from living in this dignity. | | |
| <p>The Common Good</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The human person is both sacred and social. We realise our dignity and rights in relationship with others, in community. • All people have a right and responsibility to build just and peaceful communities. | | |
| <p>Subsidiarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All people have a right to participate in decisions and activities that affect their lives. • Decision-making should occur at the lowest level possible by the people most affected by the decisions. • When the needs in question cannot be met at the lower level, higher levels of government must intervene. | | |
| <p>Solidarity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing 'with' others - we are all interdependent; what affects one affects all. • We are one human family regardless of ethnic, cultural, religious or political difference. | | |
| <p>Preferential Option for the Poor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We take up the cause of the poor as our own, to serve those most in need. • Poverty, in its various forms and with its various effects is unjust. | | |
| <p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone has a right and a duty to participate in society. • Everyone has the right to participate in those institutions necessary for human fulfilment, such as work, education and politics. | | |
| <p>Care for Our Common Home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a duty to care for the Earth's resources responsibly, as stewards rather than consumers. • We are called to share them, as the Earth was entrusted to humankind for the good of all, not just the rich. | | |

“One must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us; and those that fend off danger will lose their lives.”

“When the church hears the cry of the oppressed it cannot but denounce the social structures that give rise to and perpetuate the misery from which the cry arises.” (8/6/76)

“Defence of human rights, equality and freedom... is a matter of policy... rooted in the gospel.”

“This is the mission entrusted to the church, a hard mission, to uproot sins from history, to uproot sins from the political order, to uproot sins from the economy, to uproot sins wherever they are.” (15/1/78)

“Aspire not to have more, but to be more.”

“The gospel is the great defender and proclaimer of all the great fundamental rights of the person: the fundamental right to... food and water, shelter, protection, medicine, education, work, rest, freedom, respect, dignity, fullness of life.

“If they kill me, I shall arise in the Salvadoran

people.” “Peace is not the product of terror or

fear.

Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.

Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.

Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty.”

“The violence we preach is not the violence of the sword, the violence of hatred. It is the violence of love, of brotherhood, the violence that wills to beat weapons into sickles for work.”

“Let us not tire of preaching love; it is the force that will overcome the world.”

“If we really want an effective end to violence we must remove the violence that lies at the root of all violence: structural violence, social injustice, exclusion of citizens from the management of the country, repression. All this is what constitutes the primal cause, from which the rest flows naturally.”

Discussion questions

- Which quotation appeals to you most, and why?
 - How do you think Romero would define ‘sin’?
 - Give examples of sin that need to be uprooted from today’s society, political order or economy.
 - Does Church teaching reflect a commitment to challenge the sinful environment of our world, even to the point of others’/your own discomfort?
 - In your school or local community, is there an evident commitment to challenge injustice and defend the poorest and most vulnerable?
 - Are you willing to change when your part in supporting injustice is pointed out?
 - What can you do to promote justice?
- (Students can use the table below to formulate their ideas)

Activity four: CST, Romero and me.

List actions that you can do to 'be more' at a personal, family, local, national and global level.

| Catholic Social Teaching | PERSONAL | FAMILY | LOCAL | NATIONAL | GLOBAL |
|---|----------|--------|-------|----------|--------|
| The Dignity of the Human Person: <i>Respect, enhance and build human dignity</i> | | | | | |
| The Common Good: <i>Respect the rights and responsibilities of all</i> | | | | | |
| Subsidiarity: <i>Support, promote and develop capacity in decision-making</i> | | | | | |
| Solidarity: <i>Common vision to establish the rights of all</i> | | | | | |
| Preferential Option for the Poor: <i>Taking up the causes of the poor as our own</i> | | | | | |
| Participation: <i>Everyone has a right and a duty to participate in society</i> | | | | | |
| Care for Our Common Home: <i>Duty to care for the Earth's resources</i> | | | | | |