

## An Advent Poem by Oscar Romero

I would like to share with you an Advent poem by Archbishop Oscar Romero. As Archbishop of San Salvador in El Salvador he spoke out against poverty, social injustice, assassinations and torture. He refused to be silenced even when his life was threatened. And indeed on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1980 he was assassinated while celebrating Mass. He was beatified in 2015 and on 14<sup>th</sup> October this year he was finally canonized as a saint of the Church.

He is rightly honoured not only by Roman Catholics but also by Anglicans and is one of the ten 20th century martyrs depicted in statues above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey.

The poem is entitled "The God We Hardly Knew".

No one can celebrate  
a genuine Christmas  
without being truly poor.  
The self-sufficient, the proud,  
those who, because they have  
everything, look down on others,  
those who have no need  
even of God - for them there  
will be no Christmas.  
Only the poor, the hungry,  
those who need someone  
to come on their behalf,  
will have that someone.  
That someone is God.  
Emmanuel. God-with-us.  
Without poverty of spirit  
there can be no abundance of God.

There are clear echoes here of the Beatitudes, the opening words of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount which we heard as our Bible reading just now (Matthew 5.1-12).

Oscar Romero's love of and real concern for the poor comes across very forcibly in this poem. His words are a clear challenge to us all, not least at this time of the year with its commercialism and strong incentives to buy. For many people Christmas is not an easy time. Even in our own country there is poverty, much of it hidden. There are those who struggle even for the basic necessities of life, as evidenced by the increased demand on food banks. For some austerity is a way of life.

As Christians we should be concerned to address not only the effects of poverty but also the causes. If nothing else we should speak out for the poor and persuade those in government and in positions of influence to introduce policies that will really enhance the lives of those who live in poverty. That way champions like Oscar Romero will be truly honoured and their legacy continued.

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