My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In God’s Providence, the beautiful and challenging Gospel passage that we just heard was the same Gospel that was proclaimed at the final Mass celebrated by Archbishop Oscar Romero, 35 years ago this week.

As we just did, Monseñor Romero listened to the promise of Jesus:

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life.

After hearing this Gospel, Archbishop Romero gave a short homily, and in it he said:

“One must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us. … But whoever out of love for Christ gives themselves to the service of others will live, like the grain of wheat that dies. … Only in dying does it produce the harvest. … Whoever offers their life out of love for Christ, and in service to others, will live like the seed that dies.”

Just a few minutes after he spoke those words, Monseñor Romero was dead. Shot through the heart by an assassin’s bullet as he offered the gifts of bread and wine for the holy Eucharist.

My brothers and sisters, today we are celebrating Archbishop Romero’s memory. And we are giving thanks to God that Pope Francis has declared that he was a martyr and has scheduled his beatification for this coming May.

Today we are rejoicing with all our brothers and sisters in El Salvador and with all the Salvadoran immigrants living in our city and in our state and in our country.

My brothers and sisters, Archbishop Romero was most certainly a martyr, who died for his witness to the Christian faith. But he is not being beatified because of the way he died. He is being beatified because of the way he lived.

He is being beatified because the witness of his life is a shining example to all of us.
I know he has inspired many of you. He has also been an inspiration to me in my ministry — for his humility and courage, for his love for the poor and his witness of solidarity and service to others, even to the point of laying down his life.

Like the grain of wheat that dies, his life has produced a great harvest — fruits of love, peace and justice. A new generation has risen up committed to his vision of a new society — the society that God wants — a society in which his gifts are shared by everyone, not only the few.iii

Monseñor Romero’s life was a journey that he walked in the company of his people. And he served his people with a pastor’s love, with a father’s love.

Archbishop Romero was pastor of a people living in desperate poverty and radical inequality. He lived in a time terror and repression, when a new word was introduced into the ordinary vocabulary of the people—desaparecido, “the disappeared.”

He walked with his people during this dark time of sorrow and fear — living and working alongside this people, sharing in their struggles.

He said: “My position as a pastor obliges me to be in solidarity with all who suffer, and to make every effort for the sake of people’s dignity.”iv

My brothers and sisters, Monseñor Romero’s witness reminds us that the Catholic Church, in every time and every place — is always a pilgrim Church, always following the way of Jesus, always accompanying God’s people.

He showed us that the Church exists for only reason — to carry on the mission of Jesus, his mission to evangelize and save the world. And that mission means the Church must always be a voice for the voiceless, a defender of the small and weak; a force for love and truth, dignity and justice — serving the poor and showing God’s mercy to all who suffer.

Archbishop Romero preached nonviolence and reconciliation in a time of hate and vengeance. He spoke out against every form of violence, every violation of the sanctity of life and the dignity of the human person. Not only political violence and repression. But he also spoke often about the violence of abortion.v

Just eight days before he was killed, Archbishop Romero said: “Nothing is as important to the Church as human life, the human person, especially the lives of the poor and the oppressed. … Jesus said that whatever is done to the poor is done to him.”vi

Accompanying his people in their poverty and oppression — looking into the faces of the poor and those who were tortured and mistreated; looking into the faces of the children with nothing to eat — Monseñor Romero discovered the face of Jesus Christ.

And my brothers and sisters, the journey that Monseñor Romero made is the journey that every one of us is called to make as Christians.
Each one of us is called to follow Jesus in our own way and to reach out to our neighbors in need. Each one of us is called to seek the face of God — in the face of the poor, the immigrant, the prisoner, the sick, the hungry, the lonely.

So my brothers and sisters, let us go forward in his memory. May the seeds he planted with his life continue to bear fruit in our hearts and in the Church.

As Monseñor Romero did, let us follow Jesus with joy, love and gratitude. Let us carry the Gospel message of love and mercy into every corner of our world.

As he did, let us live for the love of Jesus and give ourselves to the service of others. May our lives produce much fruit — in this world and for eternal life.

And on this special day my brothers and sisters, let us ask Nuestra Señora de la Paz — to watch over her children in El Salvador, the land that is named for “the Savior.”

May she guide them to know the freedom, justice and peace that Blessed Oscar Romero gave his life for.

*Que viva el Beato Oscar Romero! Que viva Nuestra Señora de la Paz! Que viva El Salvador!*