



Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time B October 14, 2018

Canonization of Pope Paul VI and Archbishop Oscar Romero this weekend in Rome

This weekend, Pope Francis will preside at the canonization ceremony of two towering figures in the recent history of the Church: Giovanni Battista (Pope Paul VI) and Oscar Romero, the late Archbishop of El Salvador. In this week's column, we will look briefly at the life of Paul VI and Archbishop Oscar Romero.

Pope Paul VI - Early Life

St. Paul VI (original name Giovanni Battista Montini) was born September 26, 1897. His dad was a middle-class lawyer, a journalist and local political figure. His mother mainly home-schooled him because of his frail health. Giovanni was ordained a priest May 29, 1920. Shortly after, he was sent to Rome for further studies where he entered the Vatican's diplomatic service. Fr. Montini spent a brief time in Warsaw but had to return soon to Rome due to poor health. He quickly rose through the Vatican's diplomatic service and became an official in the Vatican's Secretariat. At this time, Fr. Montini caught the eye of Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII.

During World War II, Montini established a Vatican office to assist prisoners of war and refugees—in time, it fielded nearly 10 million requests for help—and also coordinated efforts to shelter Jews and refugees in parishes, convents and church schools. Some 15,000 lived at the papal summer residence in Castel.

In 1953, Pope Pius XII wanted to make Archbishop Montini a cardinal. He declined. In 1954, he was appointed Archbishop of Milan. There he developed a reputation as a cautious reformer, also visiting the city's mines and factories to preach and celebrate Mass. When he heard that Pope John XXIII had called an Ecumenical Council, he was heard to say to a friend: "The holy old boy doesn't realize what a hornet's nest he is stirring."

Paul VI and Vatican Council II

Pope John died at the end of the first of four sessions of the Council. Some conservatives hoped that the Council would die with him. But right after being elected pope,

the new Paul VI made it clear that he intended to continue the work of the Council which involved hundreds of hours of discussion and debate. The Council ended in December 1965.

After the Council

The Council produced 16 documents which covered every aspect of the Church's life and her relationship with other Christian churches and non-Christian religions. To help him put the Council's decrees into action, Paul VI initiated the Synod Bishops, a periodic gathering of bishops from around the world to help advise him on important issues. Currently, there is a Synod of Bishops meeting in Rome to discuss the Church and youth.

Ecumenical Outreach

One of the Council's 16 documents is on *Ecumenism*. Pope Paul had a great desire to enter into a dialogue with other church groups.

In 1964, he travelled to the Holy Land (the first Pope to go there since Peter) to have an historic meeting with Athenagoras I of the Greek Orthodox Church. The two signed a Joint Declaration and lifted the mutual excommunications that led to the Great Schism between the Eastern and Western churches in 1054.

In 1966, Pope Paul VI had another historic meeting with Paul Ramsey, the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury. Pope Paul greeted Archbishop Ramsey in the Sistine Chapel with the words "This is your home, where you have a right to be." The next day, after they had celebrated an ecumenical prayer service, Paul VI asked Ramsey to remove his ring. When he did so, Paul VI placed the ring he had worn as Archbishop of Milan on Ramsey's finger. Ramsey burst into tears, and the two men embraced. Ramsey wore the ring for the rest of his life.

Apostolic Journeys

All of us remember John Paul II for his globetrotting around the world. But Paul VI also went on several apostolic journeys. During his papacy, he visited all five continents. In 1965, he came to New York and the United Nations where he famously said: "*No more war! Never war again! If you wish to be brothers, then drop*

your weapons.” In his 1970 trip to the Philippines, there was an attempt on his life right after he landed. He offered to act as a mediator between Pakistan and India and bravely offered himself in exchange for hostages held by terrorists.

Paul VI also brought about many reforms to the Roman Curia (governing body). Two significant ones were that a bishop must submit a letter of retirement at age 75 and cardinals over 80 years old could no longer participate in papal elections. He internationalized the College of Cardinals, giving Red Hats from other continents.

Encyclicals

Pope Paul VI issued eight Papal Encyclicals, some of which were very controversial.

In 1967, he issued his Encyclical *On Priestly Celibacy*. This was controversial because it was published at a time when thousands of priests and sisters were leaving the priesthood and religious life. Many hoped that Paul VI would change mandatory celibacy to optional celibacy.

Another encyclical, *Humanae Vitae* (“On Human Life”), August 6, 1968, reiterated the Church’s traditional teaching banning all forms of artificial birth control. Because John XXIII had set up a Commission to examine this issue, many, if not most, Catholics including clergy, expected a change in this teaching. When the document was issued reaffirming the traditional teaching, thousands of Catholic theologians dissented from the teaching.

While the majority of Catholics do not follow the teaching of *Humanae Vitae* when it comes to the regulation of children, a small number of young Catholic families are very faithful to the teaching and believe it is a blessing in their lives. When Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* 50 years ago, he warned that “grave consequences” would follow if the use of contraceptives became widespread. Now 50 years later, many believe that Paul VI had an eye to the future when he reaffirmed the Church’s traditional teaching on birth control.

Hardly anyone would deny that there has been a widespread decline in sexual morality in the past forty years. All we have to do is look at the increase in the number of divorces, abortions, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, and sexually-related diseases.

Dr. Janet Smith, a huge proponent of *Humanae Vitae* wrote some years ago: “*Most abortions are the result of unwanted pregnancies; most unwanted pregnancies are the result of sexual relationships outside marriage; and most sexual relationships outside of marriage are*

facilitated by the availability of contraception. To turn the ‘progression’ around: contraception leads to an increase in non-marital sex; and increase in non-marital sex leads to more unwanted pregnancies; more unwanted pregnancies lead to more abortions. Not many women intend to use abortion as a ‘back-up’ to failed contraception, but it is often undeniably used for just that purpose.”

Two other Letters by Paul VI

- ◆ *Populorum Progressio* (“On the Development of Peoples”) - a social encyclical on the issue of global poverty
- ◆ *Evangelii Nuntiandi II* (“On the Proclamation of the Gospel”) - an exhortation reiterating the Church’s role as being a light to the world in proclaiming the truth and the grace of Christ. One frequently used sentence from this encyclical is: “*Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.*”

Holding the Center

Pope Paul VI lived during very turbulent decades in our Church and world: World War II and its aftermath, Vatican Council II, and the years following it, the so-called sexual revolution of the 60’s. As stated above, after the Council, thousands of priests and nuns left the priesthood and religious life. This was also a time when crazy things started to happen in seminaries that led to many problems later, including the sex abuse scandals. This was a time when in an effort to be relevant, faith formation programs lost touch with the core tenets of our faith. One of the saddest and destructive reactions to all the “new stuff” in the Church was a total rejection of Vatican II by Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre of France. Lefebvre especially rejected the reforms in the liturgy and the Church’s new attitude regarding ecumenism and religious liberty. He established a seminary in France and started to ordain priests despite being forbidden to do so. A form of this schismatic church is the Holy Family Catholic Church on Wickham Road by Wickham Park. This break from the Church weighed heavily on Paul VI’s heart as did the liturgical abuses in the Church, the large numbers of clergy and sisters leaving the Church, and the dissent to his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. At heart, Paul VI was a moderate, a centrist who worked very hard to hold together extremes on the left and right of the center. Perhaps all of the above led to his massive heart attack at his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo in August 1978. He died a few days later.

Paul VI was never as popular as his predecessor (John XXIII) or his successors (John Paul I and John Paul II). He did a great job at holding the Church together during a chaotic time inside and outside the Church. He was truly a pontifex, a bridge-builder. Being a middle-of-the-road pastor myself, I have great affection and admiration for St. Paul VI. At a time when our Church is more and more polarized, Paul VI is a saint whose intercession we need.

Miracle connected with Pope Paul's VI canonization

In 2003 an alleged miracle attributed to his intercession had been discovered in the United States of America. The case involved a pregnant mother whose fetus had been diagnosed with a brain defect. The doctor advised the mother to have an abortion but the mother refused to do so and requested the intercession of the late pope at the behest of a nun who gave her a card with a piece of the late pope's cassock on it. When the child was born, there were no defects that could be detected and the child's health was monitored until he became an adolescent. The child in question continues to show no signs of defects.

St. Oscar Romero, Prophet for the Oppressed

Blessed Oscar Romero was formally declared a martyr by Pope Francis in February 2015. Martyrs do not need a miracle to be canonized.

Romero was appointed Archbishop of San Salvador, El Salvador, in 1977, during a period of widespread political violence, disappearances, and human rights violations. At the time, Archbishop Romero was not considered an outspoken advocate for people who were poor and oppressed. While many clergy and religious spoke out on their behalf, Archbishop Romero did not.

Soon after becoming archbishop, Father Rutilio Grande, his friend and fellow priest, was killed because of his outward support for oppressed communities. This deeply affected Archbishop Romero, and he began to publicly denounce violence and injustice, urging people to live out Christ's Gospel message of love for neighbor. As Archbishop Romero began to speak up, people in villages across El Salvador tuned into his weekly radio homilies. He became an advocate for people who were poor—many called him the voice of the voiceless—and encouraged others to become advocates too.

He said, "We might be left without a radio station: God's best microphone is Christ, and Christ's best microphone is the Church, and the Church is all of you. Let each one of you, in your own job, in your own

vocation—nun, married person, bishop, priest, high school or university student, day laborer, wage earner, market woman—one in your own place ... live the faith intensely and feel that in your surroundings you are a true microphone of God our Lord."

Archbishop Romero was such a loud microphone for God that he was assassinated while celebrating Mass on March 24, 1980. His witness reminds us to not remain quietly on the sidelines, but to become microphones for God. He inspires us to speak out with our brothers and sisters who need help breaking down systems and structures that perpetuate poverty and suffering. People around the world continue to face oppression in many forms—it's up to us to be God's microphone by advocating on their behalf.

Blessed Oscar Romero used the radio to become God's microphone. Today we can use social media, email, letter-writing, and public events to bear witness to Christ's Gospel message through legislative advocacy. It is one of the most effective ways to create real and lasting change. Legislative advocacy can influence decision-making at local, national and international levels to change unjust policies that negatively affect our poor and vulnerable brothers and sisters. One way to use legislative advocacy to become God's microphone is by **joining Catholics Confront Global Poverty**, an initiative of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and Catholic Relief Services. CCGP provides email updates about policy issues that affect our brothers and sisters who are poor and vulnerable overseas and gives you the tools to advocate effectively on their behalf with your elected officials.

Now is the time to speak out like St. Oscar Romero did.

[CRS Resource Center, September 16, 2018—Author Genevieve Jordan Laskey]

*If God accepts the sacrifice of my life,
may my death be for the freedom of my people.
A bishop will die, but the Church of God, which is
the people, will never perish. I do not believe in
death without resurrection. If they kill me, I will rise
again in the people of El Salvador.*
- St. Oscar Romero

*St. Pope Paul VI, pray for us.
St. Oscar Romero, pray for us.*

Have a blessed week,

