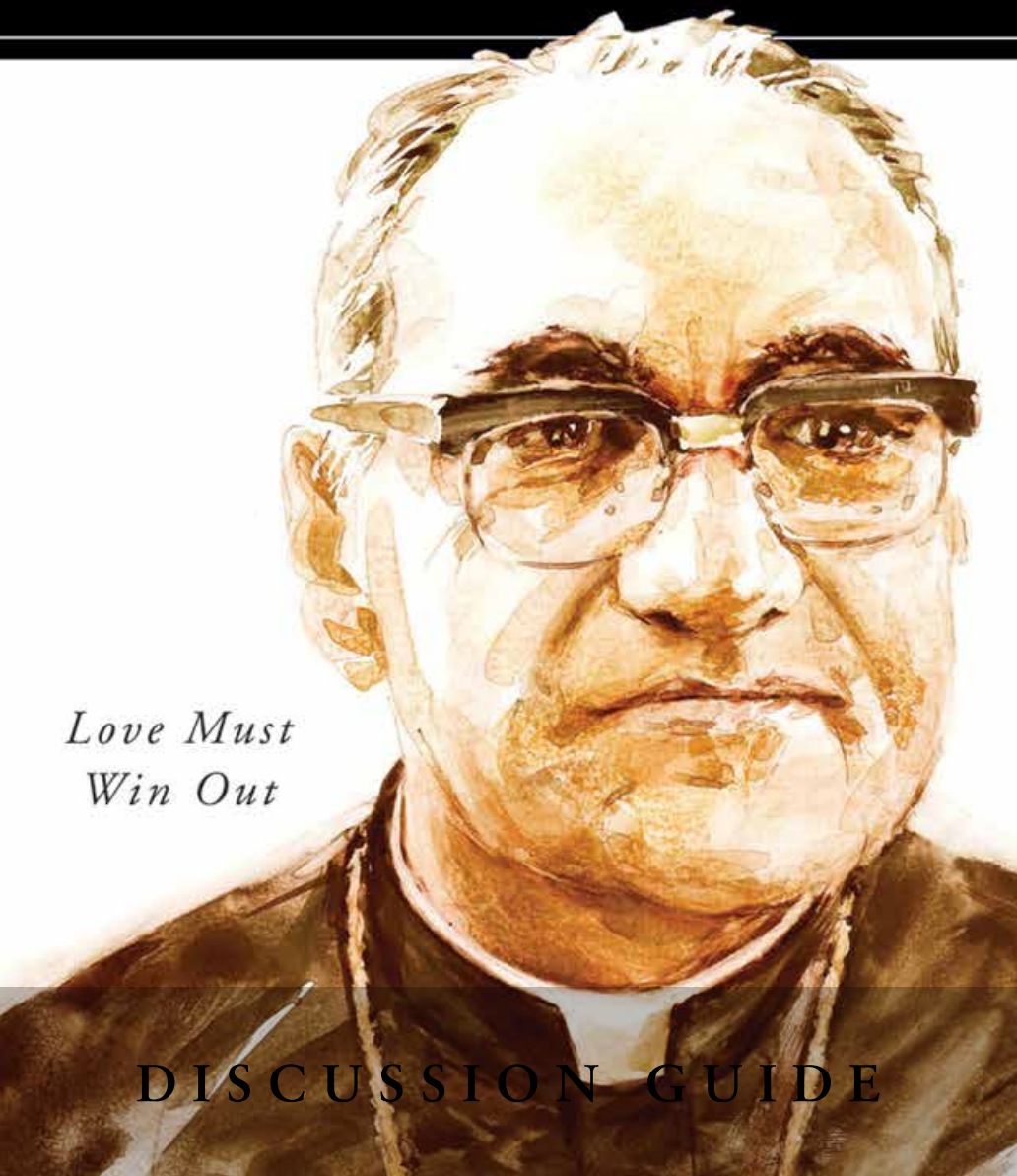


KEVIN CLARKE

OSCAR ROMERO

*Love Must
Win Out*

DISCUSSION GUIDE



About the Book

With the cause for his beatification reportedly moving along rapidly now at the Vatican, this biography of a people's saint traces the events leading up to the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero at a chapel altar in San Salvador and the reverberations of that day in El Salvador and beyond.

This in-depth look at Archbishop Romero, the pastor-defender of the poor and great witness of the faith, offers a prism through which to view a Catholic understanding of liberation and how to be a church of the poor, for the poor, as Pope Francis calls us to be.

About the Author

Kevin Clarke is senior editor and chief correspondent at *America* and its web site, americamagazine.org, where he contributes podcasts, video reports, news reports, and features. He is the former editor of *Salt of the Earth* magazine and former senior editor, columnist, and web content manager for *U.S. Catholic* magazine and uscatholic.org.



Discussion Guide

Introduction

1. What did church authorities in Rome not understand about the Latin American church during Oscar Romero's lifetime?
2. In what ways did Archbishop Romero and Pope Francis "follow parallel spiritual and practical tracks"?
3. Why has the cause for Romero's sainthood been delayed? What do you think of these reasons?
4. What kind of "revolution" did Romero advocate, and what was the nature of his political activism?

Chapter One

1. Why does the first chapter begin with the end, rather than the beginning, of Oscar Romero's life?
2. In his last sermon, Romero said "that one must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us" (p. 16). How could this be relevant in today's society?
3. What was Romero trying to accomplish in his "Cease the repression" sermon? Why was it such a threat to those who were directing the violence against the "leftists" in El Salvador?
4. Reflect on Romero's view of his own impending death: "my attitude should be to hand my life over to God regardless of the end to which that life might come; . . . that more valiant than surrender in death is the surrender of one's whole life—a life lived for God" (p. 23).
5. What is significant about the end of Romero's last homily, in view of his martyrdom (p. 26)?

Chapter Two

1. Have you heard Romero's story told in terms of "Rutilio's miracle"? Why might this version need a little nuance to be accurate?
2. Romero wrote that "the government should not consider a priest who makes a stand for social justice as a politician or a subversive element when he is fulfilling his mission in the politics of the common good." Why is this so?
3. What was Romero's childhood like? What aspects of his early life most likely affected his later life as a priest?
4. How are the economic and social circumstances of the coffee industry in El Salvador in the nineteenth to twentieth centuries significant to Romero's story? What economic and social circumstances in our own society do we need to understand our own circumstances, and especially those of the poor?
5. What is the *matanza* and why is it so important to understanding Romero's story?
6. Why did the rulers of El Salvador persecute the church?

Chapter Three

1. What modern means of communication did Romero use to preach the Gospel? What means might he have used if he were alive today?
2. What were some of the most admirable characteristics of Romero as a young priest? And some of the less admirable?
3. What are the “old-fashioned conceits” and the spiritual life and salvation that Clarke speaks of, and why does he use the word “old-fashioned” to describe them? What do they leave out?
4. Clarke points out that Romero suffered from obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCD). What impact does this seem to have had on his life and ministry?
5. What was Medellín, and why is it such an important place in the life of the church in Latin America and in Romero’s own life? Why would “pure fear” have been Romero’s initial reaction to the Medellín documents?

Chapter Four

1. The early pages of this chapter offer further evidence that the story of Romero's outlook, and the change it underwent, is not as simple as is sometimes suggested. Why?
2. What is "the Tres Calles moment" (as Clarke calls it), and how did it affect Romero?
3. What action by Romero provoked the first instance of his life being threatened by someone in public authority?
4. What was "the most poignant and profound impact" upon Romero of his short time serving as the bishop of Santiago de María?
5. What was particularly striking to Romero about the insights of the poor and powerless people in Santiago that he encountered and learned from?

Chapter Five

1. Why was the appointment of Oscar Romero as Archbishop of San Salvador considered by many in the country to be a humiliation of the man he replaced, Archbishop Rivera y Damas?
2. What sorts of flaws and weaknesses do Romero and Rutilio Grande share? What does it say to us today that these two people, both of whom offered heroic witness to their faith and to social justice, were burdened with these difficulties?
3. Why does Clarke suggest a nation so thoroughly imbued with Catholicism as El Salvador could end up with “Be a Patriot – Kill a Priest” pamphlets being passed out among some parts of the population?
4. What challenge does the killing of Rutilio Grande offer us? What might Grande have done differently that might have allowed him to avoid death? *Should* he have?
5. What practice did Romero begin on the night of Grande’s murder that came to be a consistent feature of his episcopacy? What does this practice say about him and his understanding of the episcopacy and of the church?
6. What was the significance of Romero’s decision that there would be a single Mass celebrated in the entire archdiocese the Sunday following Grande’s murder? What do you think of this decision?

Chapter Six

1. Consider the explanation offered by Romero for the change in his outlook, offered in response to a question from Fr. Jerez, recounted on page 93. What are your thoughts and feelings about these words?
2. Clarke reports that a curial official in Rome encouraged Romero to keep in mind the “prudence” with which Jesus lived his own public life and ministry. What did the official mean? In what ways was he correct? In what ways was he not?
3. What does it mean to be “an Easter Church”? What did it mean to Romero and the church of El Salvador? What does it mean to the church today?
4. How did Romero demonstrate in his daily living what it means to be a church of and for the poor? How might that translate to your own life, to be a Christian of and for the poor?
5. How might Pope John Paul II’s understanding of Romero and the circumstances in which he worked have been colored by the pope’s own previous personal experience in Poland?

Chapter Seven

1. Consider the quotation of Pope Pius XI that Romero cites in his homily of May 8, 1977 (on page 101). It is probably a bit too ecclesiastical in tone to fit Romero's own story well. How might we revise it, just slightly, to describe the conviction at the heart of Romero's ministry?
2. What reason did Romero offer in his homily for Fr. Navarro's funeral that "we cannot be communists"?
3. What was Romero's point in the homily at the funeral of Fr. Palacios regarding the presence of priests among the many other victims of violence in El Salvador? Why did he think this was, in a certain way, fitting?
4. In the words of Romero's homily on January 29, 1978 (pages 109–110), compare what he says are "the world's" beatitudes with Jesus'. How true are these observations in our society and circumstances?
5. Considering some of the words in Romero's remarkable speech at Louvain, what might be examples of the "sin of society" that the Gospel addresses or should address today?

Chapter Eight

1. What about the people's right to defend themselves against the government-backed terrorism? What, according to Clarke, did Romero think about this, and why? What do you think?
2. Consider Romero's description of the church and what it must be in the world (page 120). How does the church fit this description today? How does it fail to? How about your own parish?
3. Why was the U.S. government interested in sending military aid to El Salvador?
4. Romero received many warnings that his life was in danger. What strikes you most about his response to them? In what other ways might he have responded?
5. We read that Romero encouraged his people to "be God's microphone." How can each of us respond to that call today?

Conclusion

1. “Peace is not the silence of cemeteries,” Romero said.
What do you make of this?