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## **"Bishop Romero was a man of God"**

Msgr. Joaquin Alonso recalls a meeting in Rome in 1974 between Archbishop Oscar Romero and Saint Josemaria, which gave him the opportunity to get to know the future Blessed quite well.

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Msgr. Joaquin Alonso (Seville, 1929) studied law at the university and holds a doctorate in canon law. He lived alongside Saint Josemaria in Rome and has worked closely with

the current Prelate of Opus Dei for many years. A consultor theologian for the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, he has spent the last 62 years of his life in Rome.

*Msgr. Alonso, how did you come to know the future Blessed Oscar Romero?*

I met him in Rome, in 1974. On October 30 of that year he came to Rome (it wasn't his first trip here). Saint Josemaria had agreed to meet with him on November 8, and he asked me to do all I could to assist him. He had just been named bishop of Santiago de Maria, in El Salvador, a few days before undertaking the trip.

Bishop Romero remarked to me that his trip to the Eternal City was providential, since it was an opportunity to leave behind his habitual environment and get a broader perspective, as he put it, on

the small corner of the world that was his responsibility back home. He felt keenly the weight of his responsibility for his new episcopal see, and he needed someone who could listen to his concerns and give him encouragement.

*Do you have any specific memories of those days?*

For me this visit was an opportunity to speak with Bishop Romero at length and get to know him quite well. Our conversations were fraternal and very priestly. Among other things, Bishop Oscar Romero told me that, since the early 60s, he had been receiving spiritual direction from a priest of Opus Dei, Fr. Juan Aznar, who died in March 2004.

Later I came to know more details about his relationship with Fr. Juan Aznar. For example, he told him in a letter written in 1970: “You are the

only person who truly understands my soul." And in 1973, when sending Christmas greetings, he remarked: "I never forget your wise counsels." Blessed Oscar Romero was a priest filled with gratitude, and I was moved to learn that he had died precisely when celebrating the Eucharist, the highest act of thanksgiving.

*How did the meeting between Bishop Romero and Saint Josemaria go?*

Saint Josemaria received him on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November. Their conversation lasted almost an hour and, when it ended, Bishop Romero told me that he had been deeply moved. He said that he had felt strengthened in his faith by Saint Josemaria's words and that the founder of Opus Dei had embraced him, making him feel loved and accompanied. Bishop Romero called Saint Josemaria a "man of God" and took advantage of

their meeting to invite him to come to Central America, which in fact became a reality in 1975.

Bishop Romero also had the opportunity on that trip to greet Blessed Paul VI, and he was happy to receive some words of encouragement from him.

Afterwards he told me that this trip reminded him of his first years as a priest and seemed to him a gift from God.

*Did his contact with you continue in later years?*

I remember that on June 26, 1978, the third anniversary of Saint Josemaria's transit to heaven, he came to celebrate Holy Mass in the crypt of Our Lady of Peace, where the founder's mortal remains were then residing. I attended his Mass, along with Msgr. Francisco Vives. He gave a short homily filled with affection and gratitude to Saint

Josemaria, and said that, right from the first moment of meeting him, he felt treated as a brother. And he also wrote these words in a letter.

As I said, this took place in 1978, a year after he had been named Archbishop of San Salvador. At that time, as he himself made known publicly, another priest of Opus Dei, Msgr. Fernando Saenz, was giving him spiritual guidance.

*How did you react to news of his death?*

The tragic news was a great shock to me, while it also led me to want to accompany him with my prayer and have recourse to his intercession to ask for the Church in Latin America. I also gave thanks to God for the opportunity to get to know personally this man of God.

Rodrigo Ayude

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