



ADVENT EVENING OF PRAYER
in Honor of the 40th Anniversary
of the Martyrdom of the Four Women of El Salvador

Advent is a beautiful season of hope and joy when we celebrate Jesus Christ's coming to earth and God always with us. During these difficult days, that at times are filled with concerns and uncertainty, we come together to pause and pray. We bring to prayer all those who are suffering and in need. May Advent bring them a message of joyful hope and help us work for peace!

God is with us! This is one of the greatest truths we know. In God's plan of love, Emmanuel has entered into our history, and God has entered into each one of our lives. Our God came to us as an unexpected child. Throughout history, God continues to come to us in many different ways to offer hope and compassion. Our Advent hope calls us to be people of compassion and companions to others.

This evening we gather to remember four women who forty years ago gave their lives for the sake of the people of El Salvador. The world lost four saints on December 2, 1980, but these holy women remain with us today. They continue to teach us to be people of peace, people of compassion and hope, people of justice – people grounded in Christ. Christ comes to us again this Advent in the lives of Sister Dorothy Kazel, Sister Ita Ford, Sister Maura Clark and laywoman Jean Donovan.

We do not have to look far to know how these women might respond today. Because they chose to live in the midst of war and cry out for an end to violence, they saw the victims of suffering and cried out for an end to their suffering; they offered food, shelter and hope to the families displaced by war and offered refuge, risking their own lives; they took sides with the poor and fought for justice. In a word, in life and in death, they shared the fate of the poor. They were prophets of a future yet to come. They were seeds that fell to earth and died. Even this day they give us hope.

Sister Melinda Roper, president of the Maryknoll Sisters, in 1980 said at the time:

“Our sisters were killed because they lived as the Gospel of Jesus directed them to live. Ita, Maura, Dorothy and Jean were committed to the Gospel and thus gave their lives in love with and for the poor. That and that alone is why they died.”

RESPONSE: These women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people.

Sister Ita Ford said:

“I hope that you come to find that which gives life a deep meaning for you. Something worth living for – maybe even worth dying for, something that energizes you, enthuses you, enables you to keep moving ahead. I can't tell you what it might be – that's for you to find, to choose, to love. I can just encourage you to start looking and support you in the search.”

RESPONSE: These women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people.

Sister Maura Clarke wrote:

“I don't know what tomorrow will bring. I am at peace here and searching — trying to learn what the Lord is asking. At this point, I would hope to be able to go on, God willing. . . This seems what he is asking of me at this moment. The work is really what Archbishop Romero called "acompañamiento" (accompanying the people), as well as searching for ways to bring help.”

RESPONSE: These women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people.

Sister Dorothy Kazel, who had been in El Salvador since 1974, was part of the Cleveland diocese's long-standing Latin American mission team. Dorothy was slated to return to the United States in June 1980, but didn't want to leave, and was granted an extension. But she wasn't without fear. Confiding to Ursuline friend Sister Sheila Marie Tobbe, she said: “The steadfast faith and courage our leaders have to continue preaching the word of the Lord, even though it may mean laying down your life in the very real sense, is always a point of admiration and a vivid realization that Jesus is here with us.”

RESPONSE: These women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people.

Jean Donovan, the youngest of the four women, was engaged to be married. Her decision to join the Cleveland mission team was the result of an adult faith journey, and she was weighing the pleas of her fiancé and an Irish priest friend to return home to safety. She wrote two weeks before her death: “Several times I have decided to leave El Salvador. I almost could except for the children, and poor, bruised victims of this insanity. Who would care for them? Whose heart would be so staunch as to favor the reasonable thing in a sea of their tears and helplessness? Not mine, dear friend, not mine.”

RESPONSE: These women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people.

The Churchwomen of El Salvador join the company of countless martyrs of Central America who sacrificed their lives for their sisters and brothers. To each name, we respond:

!PRESENTE!

- + Maryknoll Father William Woods Petén, Guatemala (1976)
- + Maryknoll Sister Carla Piette El Salvador (1980)
- + Archbishop Oscar Romero Archbishop of El Salvador (1980)
- + Blessed Father Stanley Rother Santiago, Atitlán, Guatemala (1981)
- + Christian Brother James Miller Huehuetenango, Guatemala (1982)
- + José Maria Gran (Missioner of the Sacred Heart) Petén, Guatemala (1980)
- + Juan Alonso (Missioner of the Sacred Heart) Uspantán, Guatemala (1981)
- + Faustino Villnueva (Missioner of the Sacred Heart) Joyabáj, Guatemala (1980)
- + Elba and Cecilia Ramos Housekeeper and daughter San Salvador (1989)
- + Jesuit Joaquín López y López University of Central America, San Salvador (1989)
- + Jesuit Ignacio Ellacuría University of Central America, San Salvador (1989)
- + Jesuit Amando López University of Central America, San Salvador (1989)
- + Jesuit Ignacio Martín-Baró University of Central America, San Salvador (1989)
- + Jesuit Segundo Montes University of Central America, San Salvador (1989)
- + Jesuit Juan Ramón Moreno University of Central America, San Salvador (1989)
- + Bishop Juan José Gerardi Guatemala City, Guatemala(1998)

REFLECTION: Let us take some time to reflect on these questions.

What are you willing to live for?

What are you willing to die for?



POEM: "People Pushed to the Edge" (from *Prayers of Boundless Compassion* by Joyce Rupp)

Companion of People Pushed to the Edge,
let me stand with the least and the lost.
I will reach out my hand and welcome them.
Let me become one with these sisters and brothers.
I will approach each person as my teacher.

Let me accept their empty, outstretched arms.
I will receive the bounty of their inherent goodness.
Let me come vulnerably close to their distress.
I will try to comprehend the reality of their rejection.
Let me know the breadth of their daily poverty.
I will work for justice that tends to their human needs.

Let me enter their loneliness and desolation.
I will activate my empathy with compassionate presence.
Let me acknowledge that my privileged position
is part of the reason they live on the margins.
I will do my part so all may live in one large circle.

Companion of People Pushed to the Edge,
you walk among the ones easily forgotten,
those who are rejected, dismissed, and violated.
Your heart aches for how they are treated
and goes to stand with them on the far borders.

Your love knows no boundaries.
Your love does not judge or tally.
Your love accepts.
Your love gathers.
Your love embraces.

INTERCESSIONS:

God of Life, listen to our prayers for our beautiful yet wounded world.

RESPONSE: Make us one people fully alive.

1. We pray for all those who immigrate to new lands. May they find heartfelt welcome and support, we pray...

2. We pray for all those who experience discrimination just for being who they are. May they know the gifts of acceptance, appreciation and love from others, we pray...
3. We pray for those who sow division and untruths. May their hearts be softened to feel and their minds be open to hear other perspectives, we pray...
4. We pray for all those who have lost loved ones due to the Coronavirus, violence, or other illnesses. May they come to sense the presence of their loved ones in new ways and feel their love and energy as they continue their life journey, we pray...
5. We pray for all people of good will. May we experience our collective energy for good in our beautiful yet wounded world, country, congregations, families and hearts, we pray...

God of Life, make us faithful signs of your love and peace. Send us your Spirit, to seek ways that everyone can have life to the fullest. God of Life and Love, energize us for the collective journey before us. Amen.

CLOSING SONG: ON THAT HOLY MOUNTAIN

1. Cantor: The wolf is the guest of the lamb,
All: on that holy mountain.
Cantor: And the calf and the lion shall lie down,
All: on that holy mountain.
Cantor: Together they shall rest with the child,
All: on that holy mountain, on that holy mountain,
on that holy mountain of the Lord.

REFRAIN: No harm or ruin on that holy mountain.
That sacred day shall be filled with knowledge.
There shall be peace, led by all the children,
on that holy mountain, on that holy mountain,
on that holy mountain of the Lord.
(**Final refrain:** Holy and peaceful day
of the mountain.)

2. Cantor: The poor shall receive from the rich,
All: on that holy mountain.
Cantor: And the sick and the lame shall be healed,
All: on that holy mountain.
Cantor: The wicked shall be slain by God's breath,
All: on that holy mountain, on that holy mountain,
on that holy mountain of the Lord.

Cantor: Justice shall flower for all time,
All: on that holy mountain.
Cantor: As long as the sun still can shine,
All: on that holy mountain.
Cantor: Peace till the moon be no more,
All: on that holy mountain, on that holy mountain,
on that holy mountain of the Lord.

