

Roses in December : Prayer Service of Remembrance and Commitment on the 40th Anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Four Churchwomen

Gathering Prayer:

We gather today to remember four women who 40 years ago gave their lives for the sake of the people of El Salvador, for the sake of the gospel promise of peace built on justice, for the sake of God's beloved community. We remember Maura Clark, MM, Ita Ford, MM, Jean Donovan and Dorothy Kazel, OSU.

We gather here, today, in this place to recommit ourselves to their work, God's work to build the beloved community of God in this time and this place. We pray that the God of abundant love will give us a share of their spirit and courage.

Gathering Song Suggestions:

Song of the Martyrs, We Are Called, This is Holy Ground

Reading 1:

By their own testimonies, each of these martyrs articulated a real fear of death and an absolute trust in God. Maura Clark expressed it clearly: "If my time comes, will I be faithful." Their struggle to be people of integrity and commitment in the face of life-threatening situations continues to speak to us. If the lives and sacrifices of our many modern martyrs are going to have any meaning in the world today, it will be because we still feel their pain and are open to listen to the Gospel calling us:

- to risk
- to challenge ourselves to fidelity and the responsibilities of global/local citizenship;
- to be a transforming presence of love, accepting all people as children of one God;
- to hear the cries of oppression around us, particularly refugees and asylum-seekers;
- to live an ever-deepening awareness that what is worth dying for is also worth living for;
- to pour forth ourselves in love, living the Works of Mercy in the spirit of the Beatitudes.

May the grace of God be with us as we march courageously into the future casting out fear by our love, creating a world free of the violence that still is destroying life in so many ways, and seeking a peace that is rooted in justice for all. (Sheila Marie Tobbe, OSU, on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Martyrdoms of the Four North American Churchwomen)

Reading 2:

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. (Sister Melinda Roper MM, president of the Maryknoll Sisters, 1980)

Response "...these women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people."

"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." (Ita Ford, MM)

Response: "...this woman sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people."

"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." (Sr. Maura Clarke)

Response: "...this woman sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people."

Sr. 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. She confided to Ursuline friend Sister Sheila Marie Tobbe that she and Jean Donovan wondered if the murders of an Italian priest and two teenage boys from their parish were intended as a warning to leave.

Response: "...this woman 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. But the Salvadoran children, "the poor, bruised victims of this insanity," kept her there; she wrote two weeks before her death.

Response: "...this woman sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people."

Reading 3: Matthew 16:24-25

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, renounce yourself, take up your cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save their life will lose it; but anyone who loses their life for my sake will find it."

Response: "...these women sacrificed everything for the sake of God's people."

Moment of silent reflection:

“What will you sacrifice for the sake of God’s people?”

Let us pray: Loving and merciful God, you sent into the world the promise of healing for all that is broken within us and within our world. In our time, we have witnessed this saving action in the presence of our four sisters who gave their lives for the sake of your people. Their example created among us a community of solidarity which has become a seed of hope, a seed that has within it the promise of a harvest of the fullness of life for all your people.

This is your promise. We embrace this hope as a community joined in a common project of life and justice. We commit ourselves to overcome the worship of the idols of our age with worship in spirit and truth, to overcome violence and hatred with love and compassion, to overcome greed and selfishness with selfless love and relinquishment of privilege, to overcome the pursuit of individual gain and control with solidarity. May the spirit and example of Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean give us the courage and strength to incorporate this commitment into every aspect of our lives. For this we pray. Amen.

Prayer of repentance:

God, our savior, our world is broken by violence and injustice. The chasm between poor people and rich people grows wider and deeper. We have degraded this precious earth you have given us. For the sins of our people, we pray:

Response: God, hear your people, renew our hearts, make us people of justice, people of love, people of peace, people of hope.

God, our redeemer, our own society is broken by injustice, pride, fear, and lack of compassion for the others among us. For the sins of our own nation, we pray:

Response: God, hear your people, renew our hearts, make us people of justice, people of love, people of peace, people of hope.

God, ever faithful, we have often failed to witness your love and justice in our own lives. For the times we fall short from fear, despair, or lack of love. For the sin within us, we pray:

Response: God, hear your people, renew our hearts, make us people of justice, people of love, people of peace, people of hope.

Loving God, free us from all the bonds of sin. Make us a free and hope-filled people sowing the seeds of your love and justice in the world.

Let us pray for God’s blessing:

God our hope, bless this community which has come together to remember our beloved martyrs of El Salvador, Maura, Ita, Dorothy and Jean. **Amen.**

God our creator, you have promised us life and so we come to you without fear and full of your confidence. **Amen.**

God our redeemer, you have given us the example of these martyrs so that we can find the way to fullness of life in this world. **Amen.**

God our strength, you have promised us everything we need to follow you on the path of truth and justice so that we can go forth from this place with the assurance that you accompany us on the way. **Amen.**

May the God who created us, the God who redeems us, and the God who sets us free, bless us today and every day. **Amen.**

Closing Song Suggestions:

The Cry of the Poor, Be Not Afraid, On Eagles Wings, Here I Am Lord

Prayer taken from: <http://www.share-elsalvador.org/roses-in-december.html>