

Pershore Abbey Iona Service 23rd July 2023 5pm

Theme: El Salvador

Gathering Song: 🎵 God welcomes all, strangers and friends.

God's love is strong and it never ends. (x3)

Reading 1: El Salvador in Central America, was named 'The Saviour' by the Spanish conquistadors. Though only a 1/12 the size of the UK it has a population of 6.5 million people, of whom 1 million live in the capital San Salvador (Holy Saviour). The countryside and coastline of this county, known as the 'Land of Volcanoes', are breathtaking. Its lively culture has Indigenous, Spanish and Indian influences. Salvadoreans are known for being hospitable and proud of their country. 3 million Salvadoreans work in the USA and send money back home.

El Salvador has a troubled history and has been one of the most violent countries in the world. Ongoing political and economic instability resulted in a civil war from 1979 – 1992.

Catholic Archbishop Óscar Romero was assassinated in 1980 whilst taking mass in a hospital chapel. The day before his murder, his appeal to the army to disobey orders was broadcast on the radio: "In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cries rise to Heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: Stop the repression!"

The struggle for power continued after the peace settlement in 1992, with violent gangs controlling areas of the country. The current government have suspended some civil liberties to enable the arrests, mass trials and indefinite detention of suspected gang members. 70,000 are currently in detention, which is more than 1% of the population.

Corruption, injustice, prejudice and intolerance are endemic. Abortion is illegal under any circumstances and there is widespread discrimination and violence against women, LGBTIQ+ people, as well as violence amongst and towards young men.

El Salvador is mostly Christian. Evangelical churches are growing fast and will soon outnumber Catholics in followers. Evangelical churches are popular with gangs because of their message of forgiveness and that one sin is as bad as another. In this way, being gay, abortion and murder are considered the same.

Opening Responses: *(from Psalm 72)*

Leader: May the mountains bring peace for the people,

All: **and the hills bring forth justice.**

Leader: Give to your leaders good judgement, O God,

All: **and a sense of what is right.**

Leader: May they govern your people with justice

All: **and do right for those who are powerless.**

Leader: May they rescue the needy when they cry out

All: **and the poor who have no one to help them.**

Leader: May they redeem them from oppression and violence,

All: **and regard their blood as precious.**

Leader: Blessed for ever be the glorious name of God.

All: **May the whole earth be filled with God's glory! Amen! Amen!**

Song: 🎵 *(Peruvian Gloria)*
Cantor: Glory to God, glory to God, glory in the highest!
All: **Glory to God, glory to God, glory in the highest!**
Cantor: To God be glory forever!
All: **To God be glory forever!**
Cantor: Alleluia! Amen!
All: **Alleluia! Amen!**

Reading 2: The government's heavy-handed approach enjoys more than 90% support with the Salvadorean public, exhausted after years of gang intimidation and extortion. Document checks and searches are a common occurrence.

However, not everyone arrested was part of the gangs. Far from the capital's urban neighbourhoods, in the dusty village of La Noria, a young tractor driver, José Duval Mata, was arrested and imprisoned.

In April 2022, soon after the state of exception was imposed, soldiers entered his community and stopped him on his way home. They took his telephone and accused him of "unlawful association", a catch-all term under which tens of thousands have been detained for alleged gang affiliation.

José's mother, Marcela Alvarado, has not seen or heard from him since and is desperate with worry. "You hear so many things: that they're torturing them in there, that they hit them," she says between sobs. "When my son was imprisoned, I went to the jail and spent 18 days outside, with a crowd of people. And you'd hear their cries coming from inside: 'Help us, help! I can't take any more!' That caused me so much pain in my heart."

Ms Alvarado says her son's only legal proceeding, so far, was a mass hearing with 360 other inmates. They were all sentenced to an initial six months in prison - a sentence which has subsequently been extended.

Before the hearing, Ms Alvarado was advised to bring a stack of documents - from his clean criminal record and high school diploma to a reference from his employer - which attested to his innocence and lack of involvement in gang activity. She says that the court ignored them all.

Song: 🎵 *We belong to the Lord - Somos del Señor (Mexican song)*

- 1. When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus, and when we are dying, it is in the Lord.
Both in our living and in our dying, we belong to God, we belong to God.**
- 2. Through all our living, we our fruits must give. Good works of service are for offering.
When we are giving or when receiving, we belong to God, we belong to God.**
- 3. 'Mid times of sorrow and in times of pain, when sensing beauty or in love's embrace,
when we suffer or sing rejoicing, we belong to God, we belong to God.**
- 4. Across this wide world, we shall always find, those who are crying with no peace of mind,
but when we help them or when we feed them, we belong to God, we belong to God.**

*Pues si vivimos, para Él vivimos, y si morimos, para Él muramos;
sea que vivamos o que muramos, somos del Señor, somos del Señor.*

Reading 3: Fernanda, a 27 year old transgender woman, left El Salvador to seek relative safety in the USA, but the journey was not easy. With just \$200 in her pocket, she took a bus across El Salvador and used a makeshift raft to cross Mexico's southern border. For a time, she was one of the hundreds of thousands of people stranded at the dangerous U.S.-Mexico border. There, she sought safety in a shelter in Mexico, created and run by trans women in the same predicament.

Northern Central America is considered one of the most dangerous regions for women and LGBTIQ+ people. In El Salvador and across the region, trans women are especially vulnerable. The life expectancy for a trans woman in El Salvador is just 33 years, a staggering 41 years lower than the population average.

Threats and discrimination extended to Fernanda's family. Her parents, who had supported her, started receiving hate messages and were harassed. One night Fernanda and her sister were attacked, targeted because Fernanda was wearing women's clothes.

Fernanda was finally able to cross into the U.S., along with many of the women from the shelter. But many asylum seekers with similar stories continue to be turned away.

"My dream upon arriving in the United States is to find a decent job, to have an income to help my parents," Fernanda said. "I want to feel like a productive person for society, doing whatever I can: as a waitress, cleaning staff or cook. A decent job for me is where you can do something that is paid for and that is not denied to me because of how I look."

"I try not to think too much about my past but about what awaits me in the future and how today will surprise me."

Reflection with images:

Chant: ♪ **Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas, Deus ibi est.**

(Where there is charity and love, where there is charity, there God is.)

Affirmation: *(Christian Aid)*

1. We believe that God hopes and works for a world where all shall be included in the feast of life, and that in Christ we see how costly it is to bring that world about.
2. *We believe that God's strategy for a new world is to put the poorest first, and that nothing is more important for God's people than to bring the poor good news.*
3. We believe that rich and poor alike can be generous, wise and creative because all are made in God's image, and that all are made poorer when they are left out.
4. *We confess that we use our strength to protect ourselves and order the world to benefit the rich and not the poor, and that none of us can be trusted with too much power over others.*
5. We believe that loving our neighbours means working for justice, so that all can have a say in what happens to them.
6. *We believe that God made the good earth to sustain and delight us, and that we are called to take care of it and enjoy it.*
7. We believe that the God of all the earth is at work beyond the churches as well as within them, making common cause with all who want the poor to be included.
8. *We long for the time when the meek shall inherit the earth and all who hunger and thirst after justice shall be satisfied, and we believe that, despite the persistence of evil,*

All: now is always the time when more good can be done, and we can make a difference.

Time for sharing thoughts:

Song: 🎵 *Mexican Song*

1. Lord, you have come to the lakeside, looking neither for wealthy nor wise ones.
You only asked me to follow humbly.

*Chorus: O Lord, with your eyes you have searched me, kindly smiling, have spoken my name;
now my boat's left on the shoreline behind me; by your side I will seek other seas.*

2. You know so well my possessions; my boat carries no gold and no weapons;
but nets and fishes – my daily labour. *Chorus*
3. You need my hands, full of caring, through my labours to give others rest,
and constant love that keeps on loving. *Chorus*
4. You, who have fished other oceans, ever longed-for by souls who are waiting,
my loving friend, as thus you call me. *Chorus*

Closing Responses: *(Beatitudes)*

Leader: A blessing on you who are poor,

All: yours is the kingdom of God.

Leader: A blessing on you who mourn,

All: you shall be comforted.

Leader: A blessing on you who hunger for justice,

All: you shall be satisfied.

Leader: A blessing on you who make peace,

All: you shall be called children of God.

Leader: A blessing on you who are persecuted for the cause of right,

All: yours is the kingdom of heaven. Amen

The Grace:

All: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all,
evermore. Amen

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<https://www.rescue.org/uk/article/trans-womans-journey-el-salvador-united-states>

<https://www.itv.com/news/2023-06-26/el-salvadors-murder-rate-has-fallen-dramatically-but-at-what-cost>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-65596471>

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/archbishop-oscar-romero-becomes-a-saint-but-his-death-still-haunts-el-salvador>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-81749d7c-d0a0-48d0-bb11-eaab6f1e6556>

**NEXT PERSHORE ABBEY IONA SERVICE: 5pm Sunday 24th September
THERE IS NO IONA SERVICE IN PERSHORE ABBEY DURING AUGUST**