

Harvest Fast Day 2017 short talk

Thank you Father ____ for letting me speak today, and thank you all for giving me a few minutes of your time.

My name is ____ and I'm here on behalf of CAFOD – the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development. *[I'm your CAFOD volunteer and]* in case you hadn't heard of CAFOD, we have been helping some of the world's poorest women, men and children for over 50 years. [Pause]

I have a question: Have you seen the words on the poster *[say where in the church it is]? [or, you could hold up the poster]*

“We plant the seeds that one day will grow”.

It's Harvest Fast Day on Friday [OR: Harvest Fast Day was last Friday]. And at harvest, we share God's abundance with our neighbours. ‘We plant the seeds that one day will grow’.

These words are from a prayer that remembers Blessed Oscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador who was brutally murdered because he tried to help the poorest people in his country. *[if you are handing out prayer cards, you could now say: You can find it on your prayer cards].*

In El Salvador where Oscar Romero was archbishop, the words from the prayer mean so much. This is traditionally a country that lives from the land; many families depend on their harvest.

Edelmira, a farmer in El Salvador, literally “plants seeds” trusting that “they will grow”; come harvest time, they bring fruit that she sells to support her family. And, from that harvest, she gathers an abundance of fresh seeds to sow the next spring.

This is the natural abundance of God's earth: one seed yields many. One harvest produces the next sowing in the spring; and the next harvest.

Any gardener, or farmer, knows this instinctively: that nature is abundant, as God's love is abundant. But in El Salvador in recent years, farmers have bought foreign, hybrid seeds because they were told they will get a much bigger harvest for their hard work. Slowly, these commercial seeds have become widely used, supplanting stronger, native El Salvadoran seeds.

Some farmers say they might get a good first harvest, but the seeds they keep from the crop won't grow a good second or third. So they have to keep buying these commercial seeds, instead of gathering their own seeds from their own harvest.

Other farmers tell us that they've watched their crop rot on the stalk because the seed hasn't spent generations adapting to the heavy rains in their region.

Imagine watching your crop, the fruit of your hard work, rotting in the fields because of strong rains, a pest, or a crop disease. Imagine the feeling of powerlessness. The anxiety of wondering how you will feed your family now.

But, in communities like Edelmira's, CAFOD's local partners have given farmers native seeds, which are well adapted to the area's climate and threats, and yield strong, fertile seeds at harvest. These strong, local seeds are restoring nature's abundance to these farmers' lives.

So now, Edelmira can plant seeds that will grow, and bear fruit, and sustain her and her family. *[hold up the poster or gesture to it]*

“Planting seeds that one day will grow” is not just about seeds though. It’s about love. It is about an investment of love.

It is about nurturing.

It is about care.

This is what we are about. [Pause]

Edelmira’s care and nurture and love for her crop.

Scripture reflection for Sunday before Fast Day, 1 October

Blessed Oscar Romero regularly preached how “God wants a society where we share the good things that God has given for all of us”. Archbishop Romero also pleaded for us “not to tire of preaching love; as love is the force that will overcome the world”.

In our first reading today, we are called to turn away from our sins, – such as selfishness, or hard heartedness, or a lack of concern for others. Sin separates us from God and from one another. But Ezekiel says in turning from sin, we will find life. St Paul invites us to a life of love – opening our hearts to others, and showing compassion and tenderness. Love is to think of other people’s interests before our own, just as Oscar Romero did, giving up his life for others. Let us open our hearts, to God, and to others.

Scripture reflection for Sunday after Fast Day, 8 October

We heard in our Scripture readings just now about several vineyards: God’s vineyards, beautiful and well-loved by their owner, “planted (with) choice vines”, protected by hedges carefully established. And in each passage, the vineyard becomes a place of conflict, or of wild, inedible fruit; or we see marauders and wild animals come and lay it waste. It is such a clear picture of our earth; and it can also be a picture of our lives.

Let us hear and respond to the cry of the earth, and the cry of the poor. Let us turn our hearts to God in prayer, and with the Psalmist, ask God our Father to

“Look down from heaven and see.

Visit this vine and protect it,

The vine your right hand has planted”. [Today’s Psalm, 8v15-16]

Your Fast Day gifts mean Edelmira’s hard work can bear fruit now for her family and for the future.

That’s why I’m inviting you today to sow more seeds: to give what you can. [Pause]

Thank you for your acts of care and love.

If you look at your envelope [*hold up ‘give today’ side*], you’ll see it gives you an opportunity to donate money. Money can be like seeds. We can let it fall to the ground and yield nothing. Or we can sow seeds of change.

The other half of the envelope [*hold up*] is for anyone who is able to make a regular donation to resource CAFOD’s work longer term, for future sowing seasons, and future harvests. [Pause]

Whatever you choose to give will make a huge difference.

On behalf of Edelmira, her family and everyone at CAFOD, thank you all for your time, and above all, please keep them in your prayers.