

# Salvadoran Martyrs: The Women

This prayer was originally written for the 2015 Ignatian Family Teach-In for Justice.

## Writers + Editors:

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## Readers:

Emcee Readers ( )  
Jean Donovan ( )  
Sr. Dorothy Kazel ( )  
Sr. Maura Clarke ( )  
Sr. Ita Ford ( )

**Multi-Media:** [Haiku Deck Presentation](#)

**Reader 1:** Last evening we opened our Teach-In with a prayer that bridged our experiences together, commenting on our brokenness and need for God to be present in our lives. We were moved by the commemoration of the 53 Jesuit Martyrs that have given their lives in truly being **Men for and with Others**.

**Reader 2:** THIRTY FIVE years ago this December, eight years after Fr. Pedro Arrupe began encouraging Jesuits to become dedicated to the service of faith and the promotion of justice, and nine years before Fathers Segundo Montes, Ignacio Ellacuria, Ignacio Martin-Baro, Juan Ramon Moreno, Amando Lopez Quintana, and Joaquin Lopez y Lopez were assassinated alongside their housekeeper Elba Ramos and her daughter, Celina...

**Reader 1:** Dorothy Kazel, Maura Clarke, Ita Ford, and Jean Donovan were brutally murdered by the Salvadoran military for their work and dedication to the poor. They had dedicated their lives to accompanying the children and families who had fallen victim to the escalating violence and oppression that eventually brought about the civil war. This is their story.

## **Ps 15: They who do justice will live in the presence of God.**

**Reader 1: Sr. Dorothy Kazel** arrived in El Salvador in 1974 and soon fell in love with the beautiful country and its faith-filled people. Her days were spent teaching and doing parish work among poor farming families.

By 1976, political tensions rose as reforms took place that would benefit the poor community. In 1977, when a fraudulent election prompted strikes that took place in the capital city, San Salvador, 90 demonstrators were killed by the military.

Throughout the next three years violence, surrounded the work of the missionaries and many civilians were killed. The government began to arrest, torture and expel priests.

**Reader 2:** In 1979, **Jean Donovan**, a lay missionary from Cleveland, joined Sr. Dorothy in ministering to the people.

**Jean Donovan:** "I want to get closer to Him, and that's the only way I think I can"

**Reader 1:** By then the civil war had left many children orphaned or injured by the ongoing violence. This would alter the daily activities of the Cleveland mission team from parish work to servicing refugees, providing food, water, clothing and education. In time, as events worsened, Jean and Sister Dorothy tended to the wounded and dead found in the streets.

**Jean Donovan:** "Several times I have decided to leave El Salvador. I almost could except for the children, the 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."

**Reader 1:** After the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero on March 24, 1980, additional missionaries were needed for work in this community in El Salvador. The Maryknoll community sent **Sisters Ita** who had been in El Salvador for many years. **Sister Maura Clarke** was sent to replace Maryknoll Sister Carla Piette who had died in a flash flood as she saved Ita's life. A flash flood that Ita miraculously survived. Sr. Ita and Sr. Maura became good friends to Jean and Sister Dorothy.

These good friends would experience the last hours of their lives together.

Let us give thanks for those who have become our friends.

## Ps 15: They who do justice will live in the presence of God.

**Reader 2:** When danger was surrounding the mission team, Dorothy and the others wrestled with what to do next. She shared the following in a letter to a friend on October 3:

**Dorothy Kazel:**"We talked quite a bit today about what happens **IF** something begins. Most of us feel we would want to stay here...**We wouldn't want to just run out on the people**...I thought I should say this to you because I don't want to say it to anyone else because I don't think they would understand. Anyway, my beloved friend, just know how I feel and 'treasure it in your heart.' If a day comes when others will have to understand, please explain it for me."

**Reader 2:** That same month, **Dorothy** wrote a letter to Sr. Theresa Kane, a member of the leadership team for the Sisters of Mercy. She was responding to an article she had read about a talk given by Theresa to the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. She wrote:

**Dorothy Kazel:**"I was especially impressed with what you had to say about the 'middle class nature of US nuns' work' and **how important it is to serve the poor and oppressed**. I believe that wholeheartedly that's why I'm here in El Salvador. I should be coming back to the States next year it will be then that I face a greater challenge...Within this past year I had been fortunate to meet women theologians...They, along with the little I've actually read about you, do give me the hope that the reign of God is making headway and for this I am grateful. Do continue to be Spirit filled and challenging. Please keep the people of El Salvador before the Lord as we are literally living in a time of persecution and[are] in need of his strength."

**Reader 2:** Let us **pause and reflect**.

How have you served? Who has bridged together your heart and your actions? Who draws you into deeper solidarity? What frees you to be Spirit-filled...and challenging?

## Ps 15: They who do justice will live in the presence of God.

**Reader 1:** Tensions and violence continued to escalate in El Salvador. The women were encouraged to leave, to flee for safety and refuge.

Maura wrote,

**Dorothy Kazel:** "My fear of death is being challenged constantly as children, lovely young girls, old people are being shot and some cut up with machetes and bodies thrown by the road and people prohibited from burying them. A loving Father must have a new life of unimaginable joy and peace prepared for these precious unknown, uncelebrated martyrs. "One cries out: Lord how long? And then too what creeps into my mind is the little fear, or big, that when it touches me very personally, will I be faithful?"

"I want to stay on now. I believe now that this is right."

**Reader 1:** For what causes are we crying out 'Lord, how long?' Lord, for what do you need our hearts to be moved to faithfulness to create new life of unimaginable joy?

**Ps 15: They who do justice will live in the presence of God.**

**Reader 2:** Before her death, Sr. Ita Ford wrote to her 16 year old niece of the realities of poverty and violence. She saw how much life came from these murky circumstances

**Ita Ford:** "many people have found a meaning to life, to sacrifice, to struggle, and even to death. And whether their life span is 16 years, 60 or 90, for them, their life has had a purpose."

**Reader 2:** She continues to write and her words can speak for all of us:

**Ita Ford:** "I hope 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."

**Reader 2:** Pope Francis in his address to Congress mentioned, "Each son or daughter of a given country has a mission, a personal and social responsibility." What is it that energizes you? Enthuses you? and Enables you to keep moving ahead? What is your mission, your personal and social responsibility?

**Ps 15: They who do justice will live in the presence of God.**

**Reader 1:** In November of 1980 Maura and Ita travelled to Nicaragua to attend a regional assembly of the Maryknoll Sisters.

On December 2nd, Ita and Maura boarded a plane to return to El Salvador. They were met at the airport by Dorothy and Jean. After leaving the airport, members of El Salvador's National Guard hijacked their van.

They were taken to an isolated location, here they were raped, shot, and buried in a shallow grave by a road.

{Pause for reverent silence}

**Reader 2:** The blood of the churchwomen would become a bridge to greater solidarity between the people in the U.S. and this tiny country. Many parishes in the U.S. have twinned or adopted a parish in El Salvador.

Efforts of many religious communities have contributed to the needs in both material and spiritual ways. Individuals touched by the story of El Salvador have visited this small country, been opened up to the world beyond their home and changed.

How have you opened up your world?

How is the Spirit calling you to give your own life to service?

**Ps 15: They who do justice will live in the presence of God.**

**Reader 2:**

We close with a reflection given by Sister Mary McGlone, CSJ five years ago:

**Dorothy Kazel:** "Not all of us are called into direct service of the poor. Very few of us are called to leave our homeland to serve neighbors far beyond our borders. But all of us are called to cultivate and incarnate our catholic identity. By that I mean to be and ever become the church women and church men that the world needs now.

**Maura Clarke:** Catholic identity keeps us aware that no matter what our nationality or language, we are part of one family - a world-wide family in which every one of us is called to defend the welfare of the most vulnerable.

**Jean Donovan:** The lives of Ita, Jean, Maura, and Dorothy remind us that to follow Christ is to plant the grain of wheat of our lives where it can nourish those who most need us. They show us that to follow Christ is to take up the cross of our needy neighbor daily.

**Ita Ford:** Their memory calls us to incarnate the Reign of God here and now, so that the world may begin to believe that no matter what the appearance, no matter what the powers of the world try to prove, *love trumps fear*. The grain of wheat that is planted in the good ground of the Reign of God bears fruit that will last.”

**Reader 1:** Let us remember them and go and do likewise, together.

**Reader 2:** Please join hands and sing allowing us to emphasize that “going and doing likewise” is done best in solidarity, in collaboration with others for the good of all especially those most in need.

**Close: Unless A Grain of Wheat**