



Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero, slain in 1980 by a paramilitary death squad while celebrating mass in San Salvador, died as a martyr and thus deserves beatification, Pope Francis decreed on Tuesday.

Francis approved a decree that Romero had been killed “in hatred of the faith,” supporting recommendations by theological experts and a commission of cardinals. Francis unblocked Romero’s sainthood process shortly after his election in March 2013. Romero’s beatification will take place in El Salvador, but the Vatican did not provide a date.

The Vatican has stalled Romero’s sainthood for years — under Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI — due to the archbishop’s association with liberation theology, a religious tradition that contends that Jesus’s teachings require followers to fight for social and economic justice. Romero, already an unofficial saint to much of Central America, was considered by El Salvador’s military to be an intellectual leader of the country’s guerrilla movement, which was locked in a 1979-1992 civil war with the United States-backed government that ultimately claimed 75,000 lives.

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