Abraham believed, hoping against hope, that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “Thus shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead—for he was almost a hundred years old—and the dead womb of Sarah. He did not doubt God’s promise in unbelief; rather, he was empowered by faith, giving glory to God, and fully convinced that what God had promised he was also able to do. That is why “it was credited to him as righteousness.” It was not for Abraham alone that it was written that “it was credited to him,” but also for us, to whom it will be credited, who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was handed over for our transgressions and was raised for our justification. (Rom. 4:18-25)

I have always been struck by the phrase “Abraham believed, hoping against hope.” One commentator translated it this way: “Faced with a hopeless situation in human estimation; nonetheless, with divine hope Abraham believed.”

One of my favorite saints also believed, hoping against hope. St. Oscar Romero was the Archbishop of San Salvador during the civil war. In a country of 4.8 million people, 75,000 people were killed, including many catechists, some religious sisters, and 18 priests. Romero was assassinated in March of 1980, but three months earlier he gave a homily of hope on Christmas eve. As you listen to his words, remember that by this time several priests had been murdered, thousands of people had been tortured and killed, and Romero was receiving death threats.

In that context, on Christmas Eve he said, “The country is giving birth to a new time. That is why there is pain and anguish, blood, and suffering. Christ reminds us that the woman suffers when the time is at hand, but when she gives birth to a new human being, she forgets all her pain.

These times of suffering will also pass! Afterwards, we will have the joy of knowing that when the pain of the birth came, we lived as Christians, clinging to our faith in Christ, and that because of it, we did not give in to hopelessness.

What seems impossible now – what seems a dead-end street – is already being marked by God with hope. This evening we are called to live with the optimism that tells us that, even though we don’t know how, God will bring our country out of its troubles, and in the new moment which is to come, the good news of Jesus Christ will still be shining.” (Oscar Romero, Homily on Christmas Eve, 1979)

St. Oscar Romero had hope rooted in the death and resurrection of Christ. He believed that the paschal mystery was at work in him and in the Church. He believed that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ defines us. That is why he could look at violence, political corruption, and death and see new birth. As you live each day, be mindful of the paschal mystery of Christ at work in you – hoping against hope. Faced with a hopeless situation in human estimation, with divine hope nonetheless we believe.